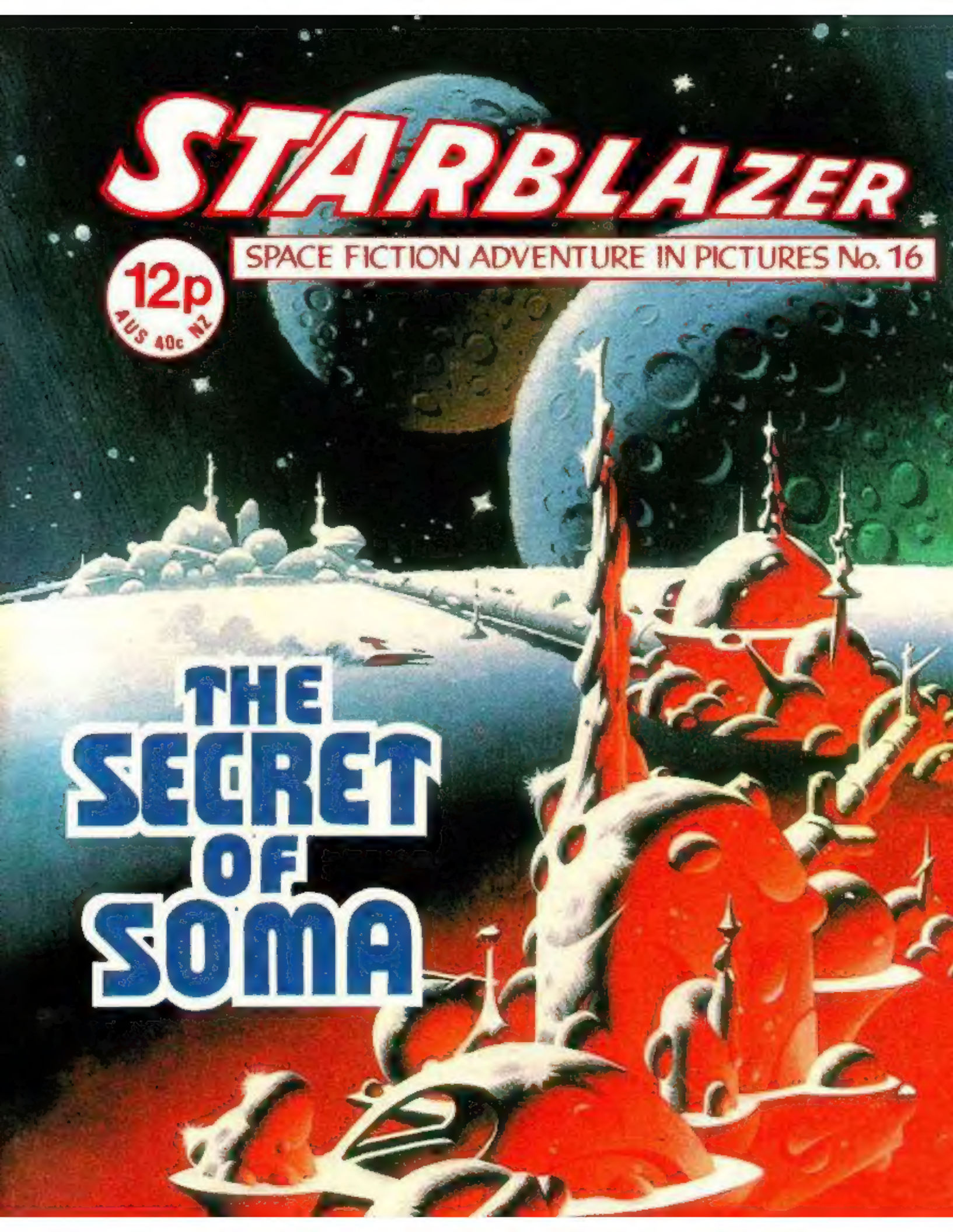


STARBLAZER

12p
AUS 40c NZ

SPACE FICTION ADVENTURE IN PICTURES No. 16

THE SECRET OF SOMA



STARBLAZER



The Galaxy was a collection of independent worlds living and trading peacefully. Earth held a prominent place because of its supplies of ficamite—the mineral that made faster than light travel a reality. Most worlds traded and bartered for ficamite, but the Soma demanded more than their share, and threatened to wipe out the population of Earth unless their demands were met.

THE SECRET OF SOMVA

DEEP INSIDE A COMMUNICATIONS DOME, EARTH'S LEADERS HELD DESPERATE TALKS.





IF WE DON'T DO AS THE SOMA ASK, THEY'LL ATTACK. WE CANNOT HOLD OUT FOR MORE THAN A MONTH AT THE MOST.

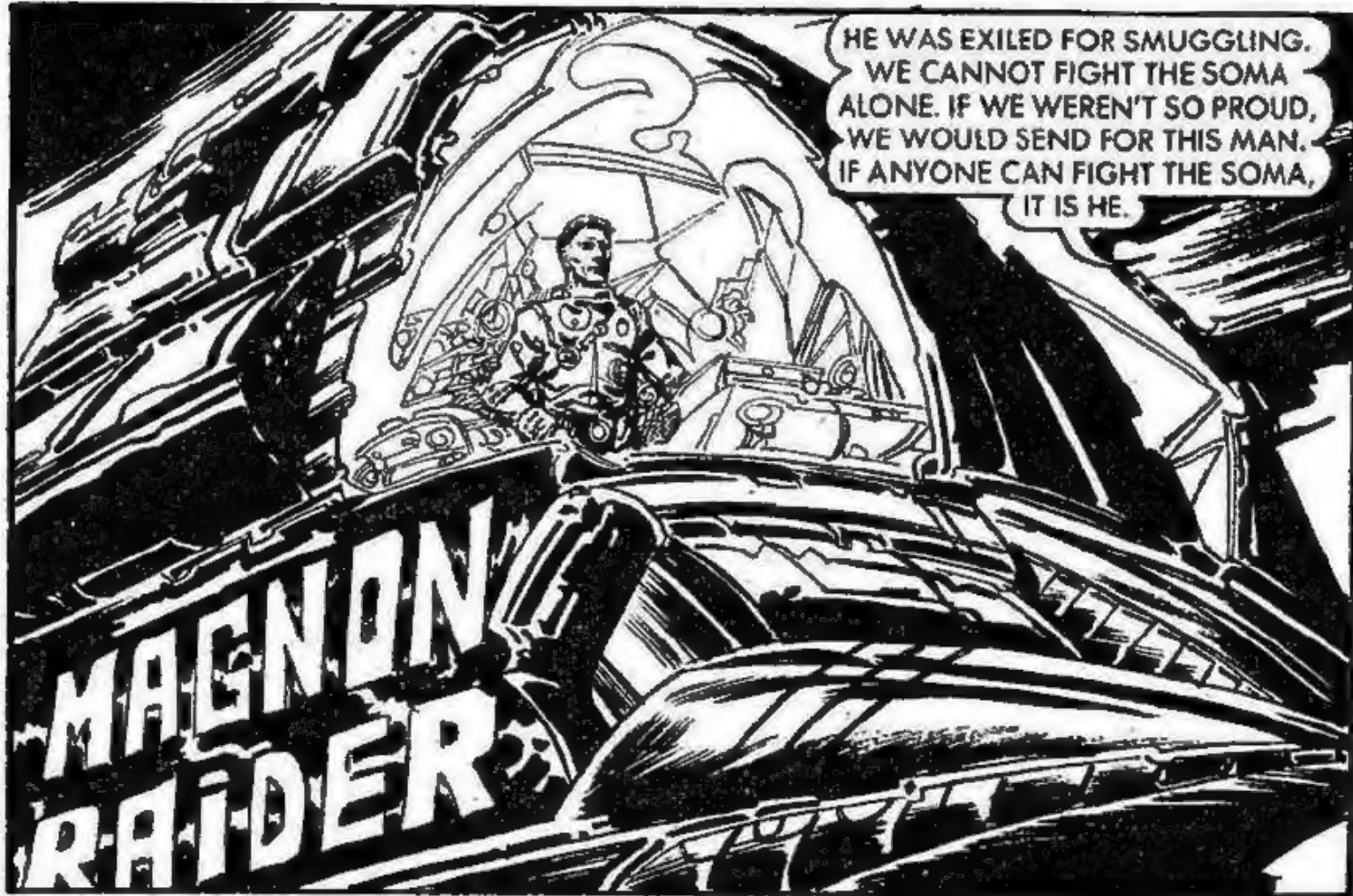


LISTEN TO ME. WE ARE ALL AWARE OF AN ALTERNATIVE, BUT WE ARE ALL TOO SCARED TO SUGGEST IT ...

... ONLY TEN LAPTONES AGO, A MAN WAS EXILED FROM EARTH AND SENT TO ROAM THE SPACEWAYS ALONE.



HE WAS ALLOWED ONE LAPTONE TO PREPARE
FOR HIS JOURNEY, AND TO THE BEST OF OUR
KNOWLEDGE, HE CONSTRUCTED THE FASTEST
AND MOST DEVASTATINGLY POWERFUL VESSEL
KNOWN TO MANKIND...



THE COUNCIL'S ATTENTION WAS RIVETED TO THE SCREEN AS BETA CONTINUED.

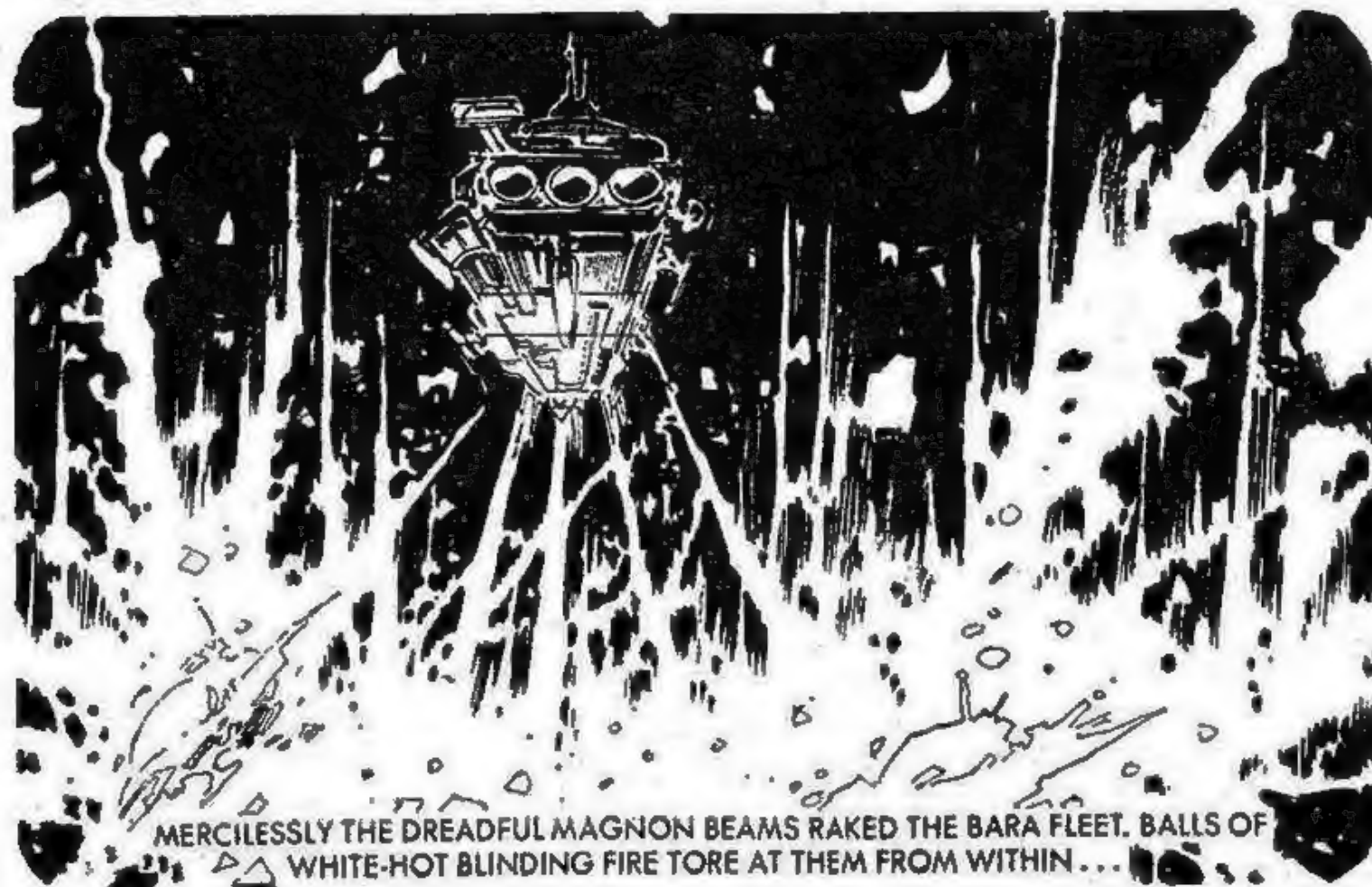
ALMOST AS SOON AS HE CLEARED
THE SOLAR SYSTEM, HE WAS
ATTACKED BY BARA PIRATES. YOU
WILL NOW WITNESS WHAT
HAPPENED...




THE BARA PIRATES HAD A SHOCK COMING.




OUTMANOEUVERED AND OUTGUNNED, THE WORST WAS NOT OVER FOR THE OUTLAWS.




MERCILESSLY THE DREADFUL MAGNON BEAMS RAKED THE BARA FLEET. BALLS OF
WHITE-HOT BLINDING FIRE TORE AT THEM FROM WITHIN...




THE LAST PIRATE FLED. YOU HAVE SEEN WHAT
THE MAGNON RAIDER CAN DO. EARTH IS IN
SERIOUS JEOPARDY, WE NEED THAT
MAGNON RAIDER...



AND WE NEED THE MAN
BEHIND IT... ZENOS.



WE BANISHED HIM FOR SMUGGLING.
HOW CAN WE ASK HIM TO RETURN?



HIS TWO FRIENDS ARE STILL HERE. THEY
ARE IN PRISON. WE WILL PROVIDE THEM
WITH A SHIP AND THEIR FREEDOM FOR
BRINGING US ZENOS AND THE
MAGNON RAIDER. WE HAVE NO CHOICE.
UNAIDED, WE ARE NO MATCH FOR THE
SOMA.

BETA CONSULTED ZENOS' FRIENDS—NABRI FROM ALPHA XII, AND JO, THE DUMB SAMURAI.



NABRI AND JO WERE ESCORTED TO THE OLD ZX40 IN WHICH THEY WERE TO SEARCH FOR ZENOS.



NABRI AND JO ROARED AWAY FROM MOTHER EARTH—DESTINATION UNKNOWN.

HERE'S HOPING THE
SOMA DIDN'T SPOT US.

A black and white comic book panel showing Nabri and Jo in the cockpit of a spaceship. Nabri, a bearded alien with a large nose, is on the left, looking out the window. Jo, a human man, is on the right, looking at Nabri. The background shows a view of Earth from space, with a city visible on the horizon.

BUT THE SOMA HAD SPOTTED THEM.

A FEEBLE EARTHLING SHIP IS TRYING
TO SLIP BY THE MIGHTY SOMA
FORCES.

A black and white comic book panel showing two SOMA aliens in the cockpit of a spaceship. The alien on the left is wearing a hat and has a large, spiky headpiece. The alien on the right is wearing a more ornate, spiky headpiece. They are both looking out the window at a small Earthling ship in the distance. The background shows a view of Earth from space, with a city visible on the horizon.



THREE TINY SOMA FIGHTERS WHEELED AWAY FROM THE WARSHIP TO DESTROY THE OLD ZX40.



BUT NABRI HAD ANTICIPATED SUCH AN ATTACK,
AND JO SAT ASTRIDE A SPACESCOOTER . .
READY AND WAITING.

YOU'RE TOO SMALL FOR THEM TO
PICK UP, JO. LET THEM GET FAIRLY
CLOSE, THEN GIVE IT TO THEM.

JO AND THE SPACE-BIKE SWEEP IN FOR THE KILL

JO'S SEARING MAGNON FIRE RIPPED THROUGH THE SOMA AS NABRI BLASTED THE LEADER



JUST LIKE
OLD TIMES JO, EH?

USELESS FOOLS. THEY DISGRACE THE
SOMA FLEET. NAVIGATOR, WE WILL
DESTROY THE FILTHY EARTHLINGS
OURSELVES.



ON BOARD THE ZX40.



THEIR FORCE SHIELDS ARE OUT.
THERE'S GAPS AT CO-ORDINATES
43.09 AND 78.02, FIRE AT THOSE
IF YOU GET A CHANCE, JO.



GO GET 'EM, JO.



YOU FOOL! CAN'T YOU BE TRUSTED TO DO ANYTHING. GET OUT OF THE WAY.

NOW WE'D BETTER RUN. OUR SHIELDS WON'T TAKE MUCH MORE OF THIS.



THE CHIEF SOMA'S FACE APPEARED ON THE COMPUPANEL.

YOU GALACTIC REFUSE. YOU ARE STUPID ENOUGH TO TRY AND RUN FROM THE NOBLE SOMA WARSHIP. YOUR FEEBLE EFFORTS COULD LEAD TO THE TOTAL DESTRUCTION OF EARTH. I ORDER YOU TO STOP.

COME AND GET US FISH-FACE.

THEY HAVE INSULTED THE NOBLE
SOMA. I WILL PUNISH THEM BEFORE
THEY DIE.

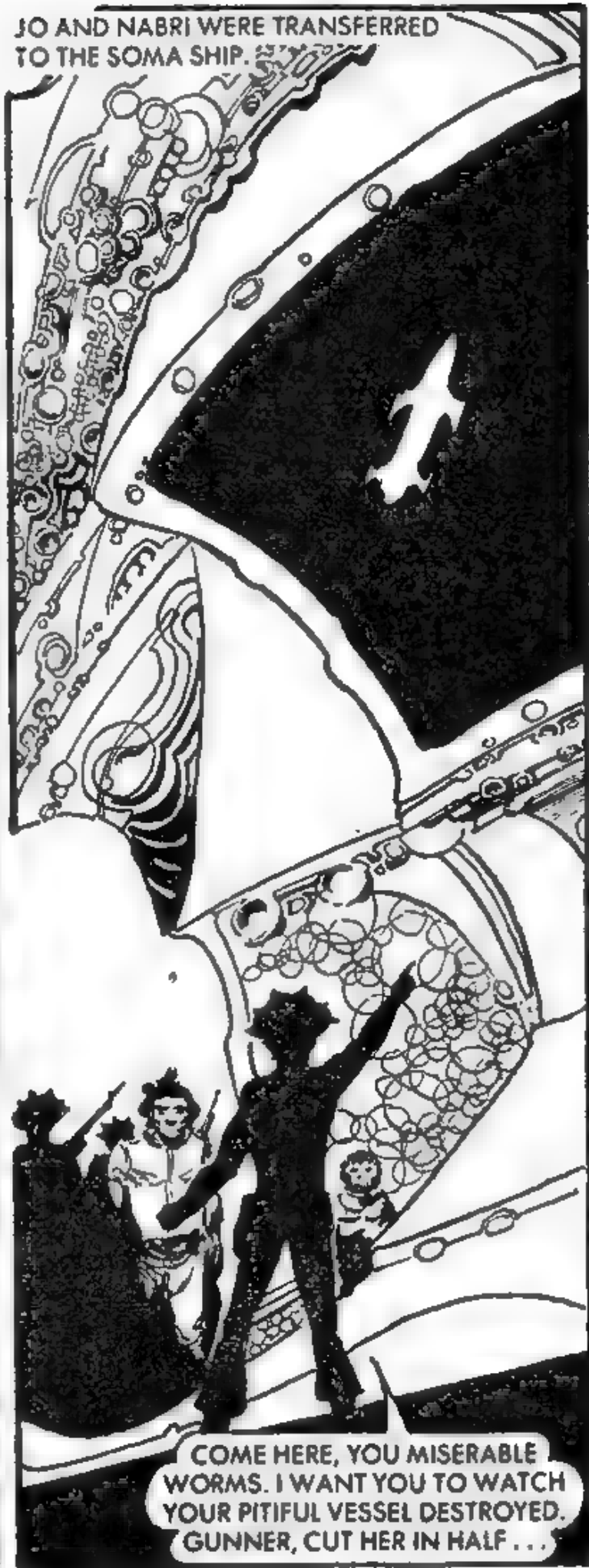


IT'S NO GOOD, JO. WE'LL HAVE TO
SURRENDER. THE SHIELDS CAN'T TAKE ANY MORE.
IF WE DON'T THEY'LL BLOW US OUT OF THE
SPACEWAYS.

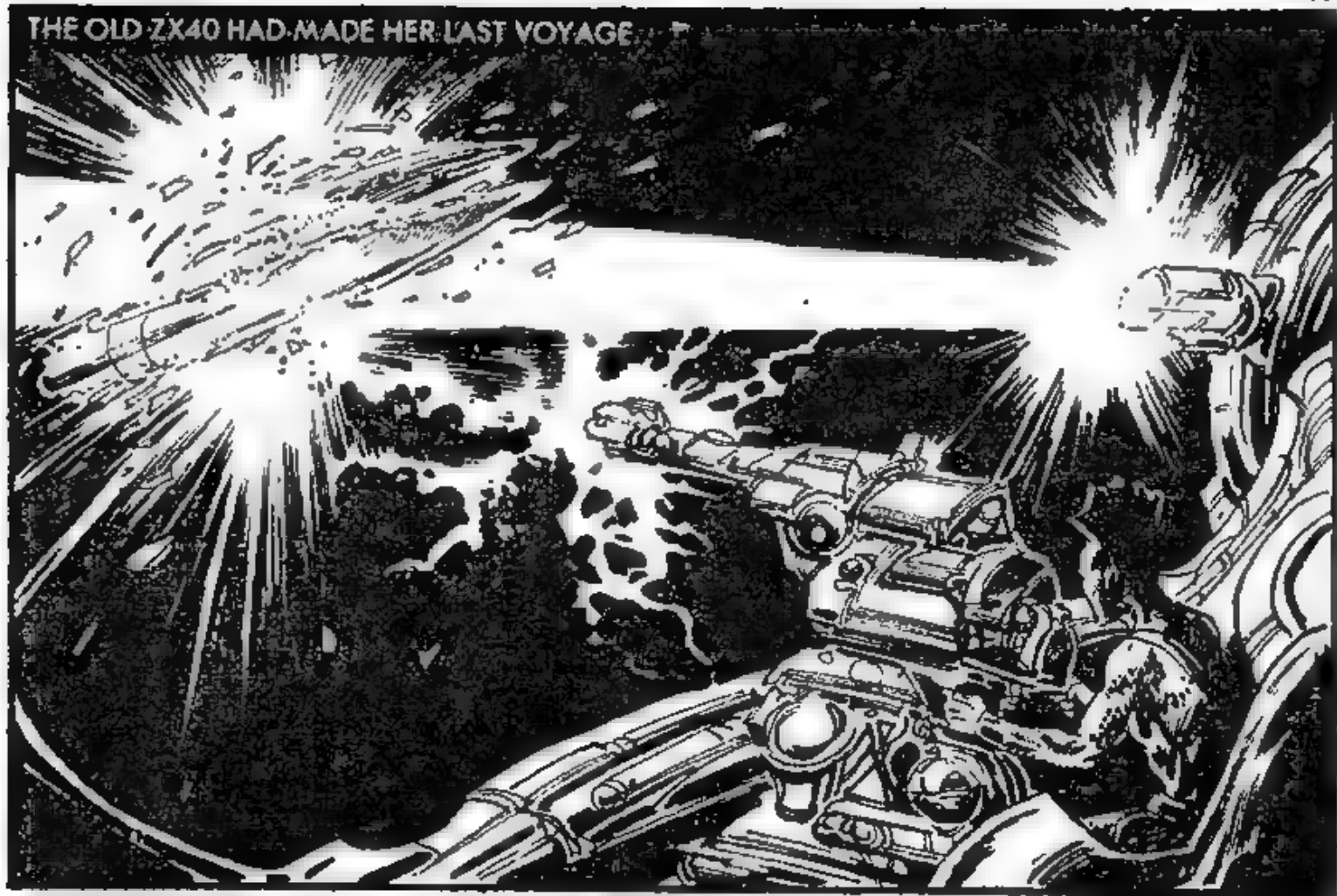




JO AND NABRI WERE TRANSFERRED TO THE SOMA SHIP.



THE OLD ZX40 HAD MADE HER LAST VOYAGE.




YOU WHO DARE TO DEFY THE SOMA
WILL BE LOCKED AWAY TO
CONSIDER YOUR FATE. YOU WILL
NOT DIE QUICKLY. TAKE THEM
BELOW.




WHEN THE SHAKING STOPPED.



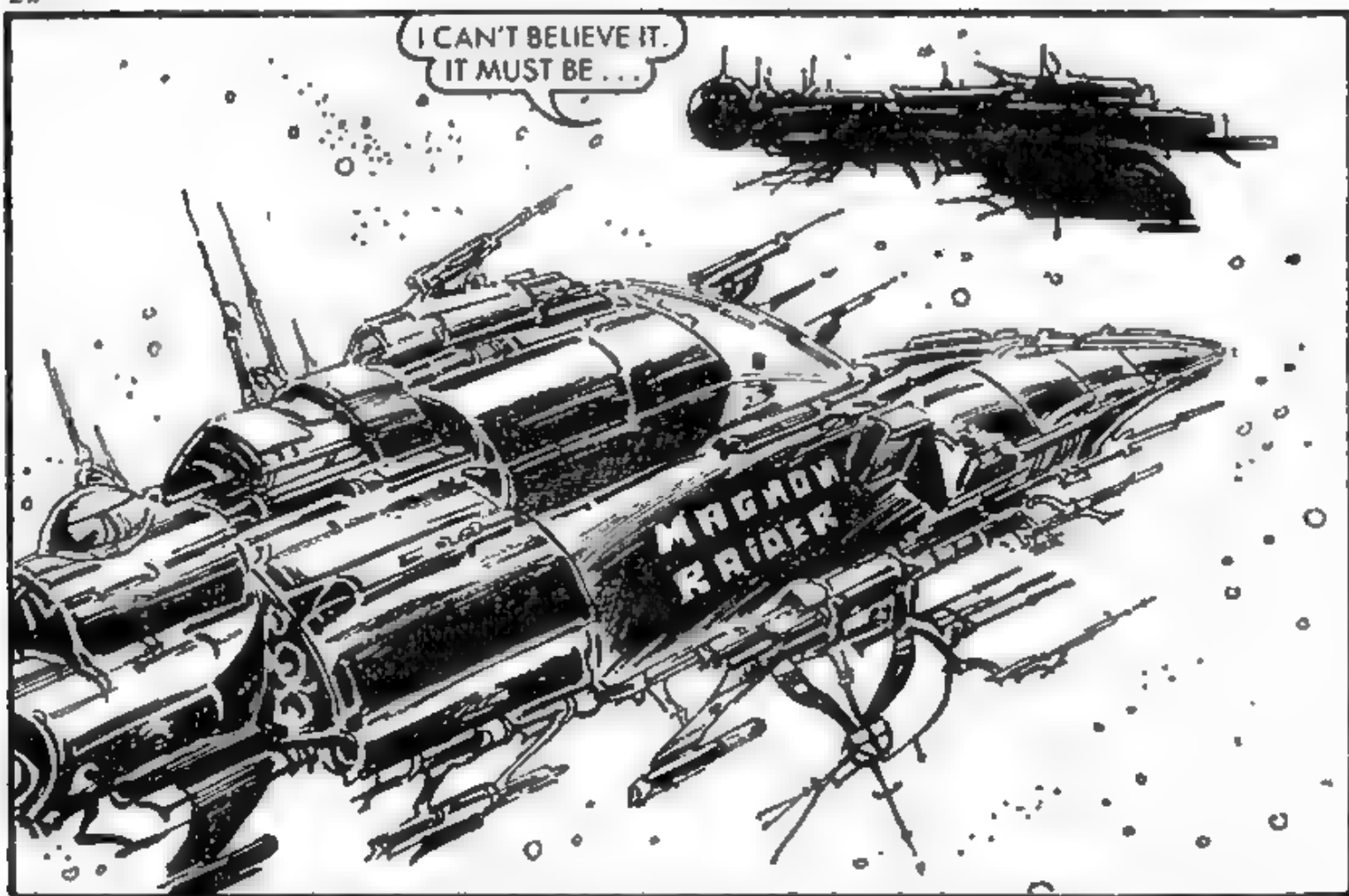
YOU WILL COME WITH US.



THIS TIME YOU ARE LUCKY. I SHOULD HAVE
KILLED YOU WHEN I HAD THE CHANCE...



THERE IS A VESSEL OUT
THERE THAT DEMANDS YOUR
RELEASE. IT IS A SUPERIOR
VESSEL TO THIS ONE. WE
HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO
RELEASE YOU.





ZENOS... IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU
AGAIN.



... SO THE COUNCIL WANTS
YOU TO RETURN AND HELP BEAT
OFF THE SOMA.

I HAD NO IDEA EARTH
WAS IN SUCH A FIX.
I'VE BEEN TO THE FAR
REACHES OF THE
GALAXY AND IT WAS
ONLY OUT OF
HOMESICKNESS THAT
I CAME BACK AND
SPOTTED THE OLD ZX
BEING SHOT TO PIECES

COMMUNICATIONS
BETWEEN ZENOS AND
THE EARTH COUNCIL
WERE RESTORED.

WE ARE GRATEFUL THAT
YOU ARE TO HELP US,
ZENOS. OUR COMPUTERS
ARE AT YOUR DISPOSAL.
EVERYTHING WE KNOW
ABOUT THE SOMA IS THERE.



I'LL LINK IN MY COMPUTER
AND WE'LL TAKE IT FROM
THERE.

WHILE THE COMPUTER WAS ABSORBING THE DETAILS OF THE SOMA, ZENOS EXPLAINED THE WORKINGS TO HIS TWO COMPANIONS.

... AND THAT'S THE COMPUTER. IT OBEYS THE SPOKEN WORD, BUT DON'T TRY TO BEAT IT AT CHESS—I CAN'T EVEN WIN AT THE OLD TWO DIMENSIONAL GAME ...

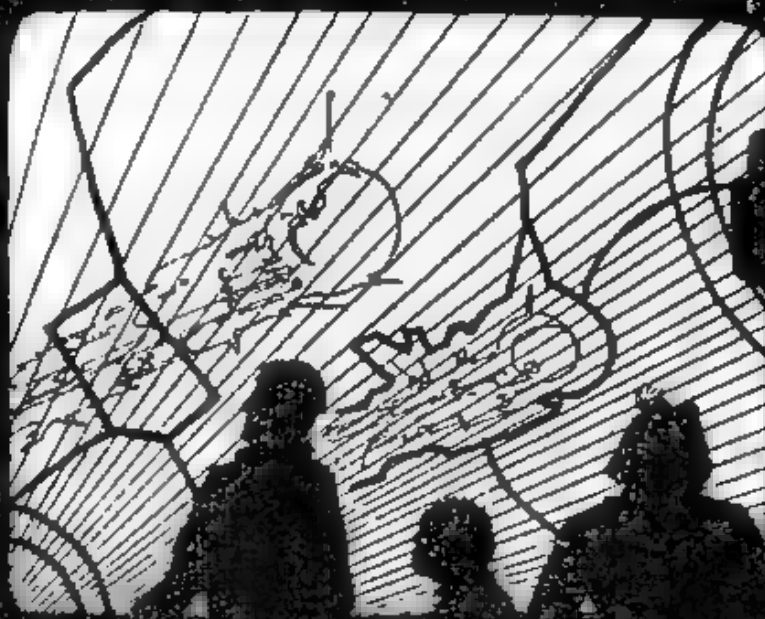
... THE MAGNON BANKS ARE FULLY CHARGED. ENOUGH TO KEEP US GOING FOR YEARS, AND THE COMPUTER CAN HANDLE TACTICS AS WELL AS GUNNERY ...

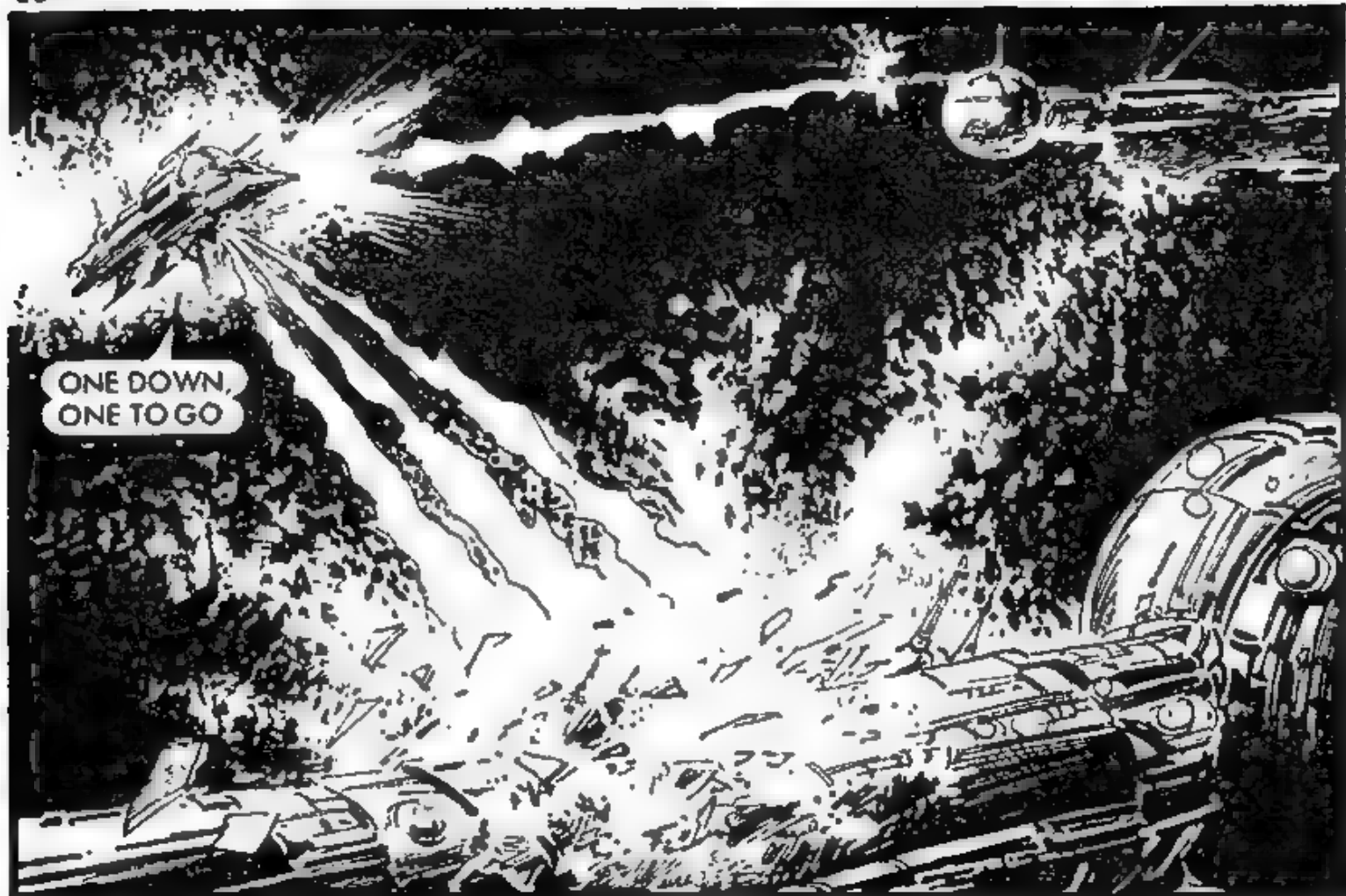
DANGER! DANGER! TWO CRAFT APPROACHING. SECTOR 9 AND CLOSING. SCREENS OUT. WEAPONRY ON STAND BY ...

SOMA! I THINK THEY MEAN BUSINESS.
HOLD YOUR FIRE, COMPUTER. LET'S SEE WHAT
THEY HAVE TO SAY. KEEP THOSE SCREENS ON
MAXIMUM.



THERE IS NO ESCAPE. OUR
NOBLE FLEET IS ON THE
WAY. SURRENDER
IMMEDIATELY OR WE WILL
DESTROY YOU.





DANGER! DANGER! EIGHT VESSELS APPROACHING SECTOR
14 AND CLOSING. SAME READING AS CURRENT TARGET.







THEY'RE SHOOTING LIKE MADMEN...
AND HIT ONE OF THEIR OWN VESSELS.

COMPUTER. LIGHT FACTOR 2. MAKE A GALATIC CIRCLE
AND BRING US BACK TO THE DARK SIDE OF THE EARTH.

THE MAGNON RAIDER SNAPPED AWAY
IN A VAST ARC THROUGH SPACE.

WE'LL LEAVE HER IN
ORBIT. AS LONG AS
SHE'S IN THE SHADOW
THE SOMA CAN'T PICK
HER UP.

HOW ARE WE GETTING DOWN?



BY SPACE-BUG. I HOPE YOU TWO
HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN HOW TO
USE THEM?

NOT A CHANCE.



WE RENDEVOUS AT BASE
5L JUST NORTH OF DURBAN.

THE DEFENCE COMMAND BUILDING HADN'T CHANGED IN THE TEN LAPTONES SINCE ZENOS HAD BEEN IN EXILE



SHORTLY AFTER TOUCHING DOWN

I THINK JO IS INTRODUCING HIMSELF TO THE GUARDS AT THE MOMENT.




I DON'T THINK THEY WERE EXPECTING US ZENOS.






AS I UNDERSTAND IT, THERE IS A HUGE
ELECTRONIC BRAIN SOMEWHERE BENEATH THE
PLANET SOMA ...



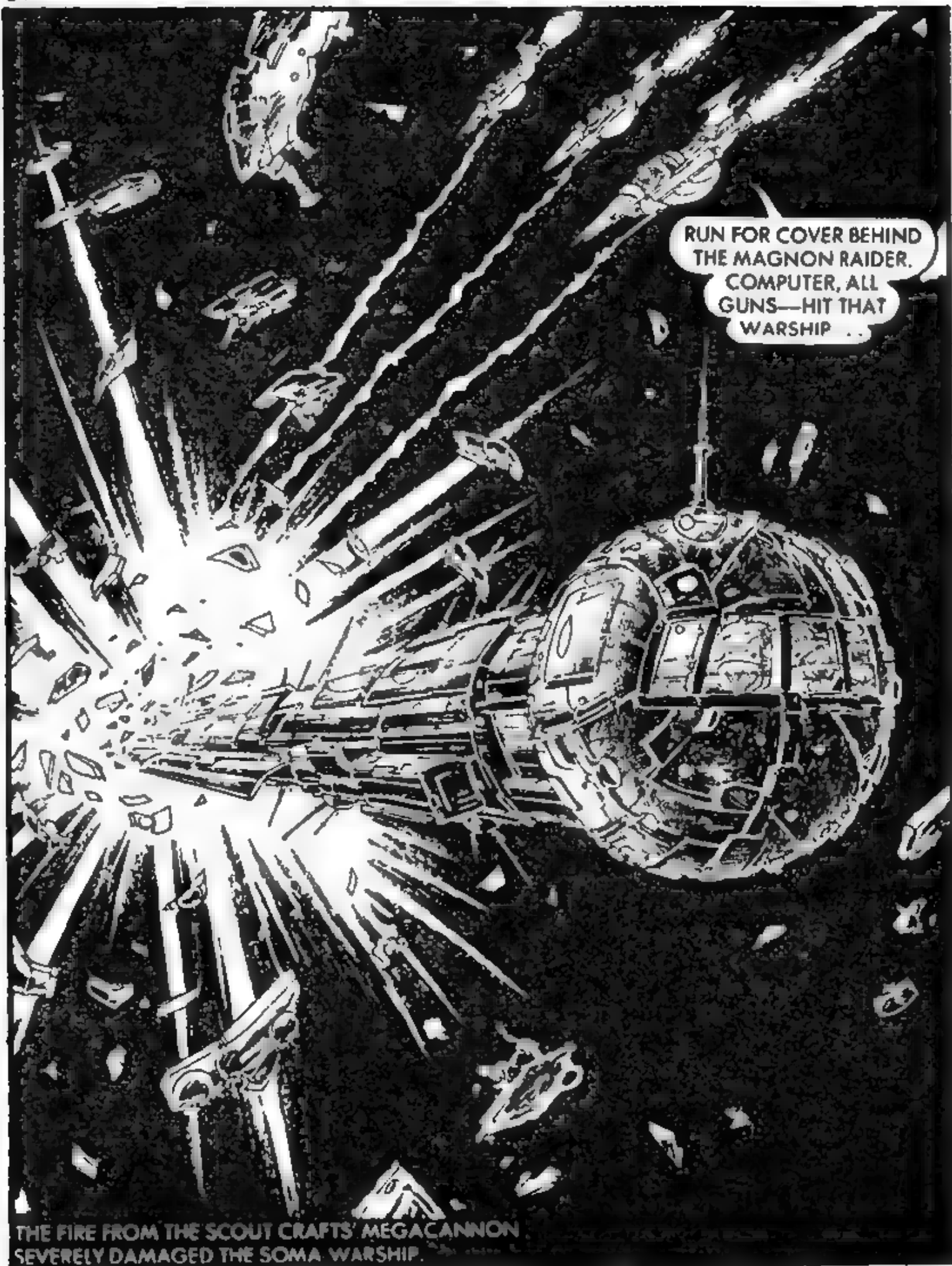
... IT IS IN CONSTANT TOUCH WITH ALL
VESSELS OF THE SOMA FLEET, AND MONITORS
EVERYTHING THAT THE VESSELS THEMSELVES
DO ...



... MUCH MORE SOPHISTICATED
THAN ANYTHING WE'VE GOT. SOME
SAY IT CONTROLS THE SOMA
THEMSELVES.

DO WE HAVE A DEFINITE
LOCATION FOR THIS BRAIN
ON SOMA?





RUN FOR COVER BEHIND
THE MAGNON RAIDER.
COMPUTER, ALL
GUNS—HIT THAT
WARSHIP . .

THE FIRE FROM THE SCOUT CRAFTS' MEGACANNON
SEVERELY DAMAGED THE SOMA WARSHIP.



THE THREE DOCKED SAFELY IN THE MAGNON RAIDER.

SOMA IS ABOUT A LAPSTONE
AWAY IN A CONVENTIONAL
CRAFT, BUT WE HAVE UP TO
LIGHT FACTOR THREE. IT
WON'T TAKE US LONG TO GET
THERE.

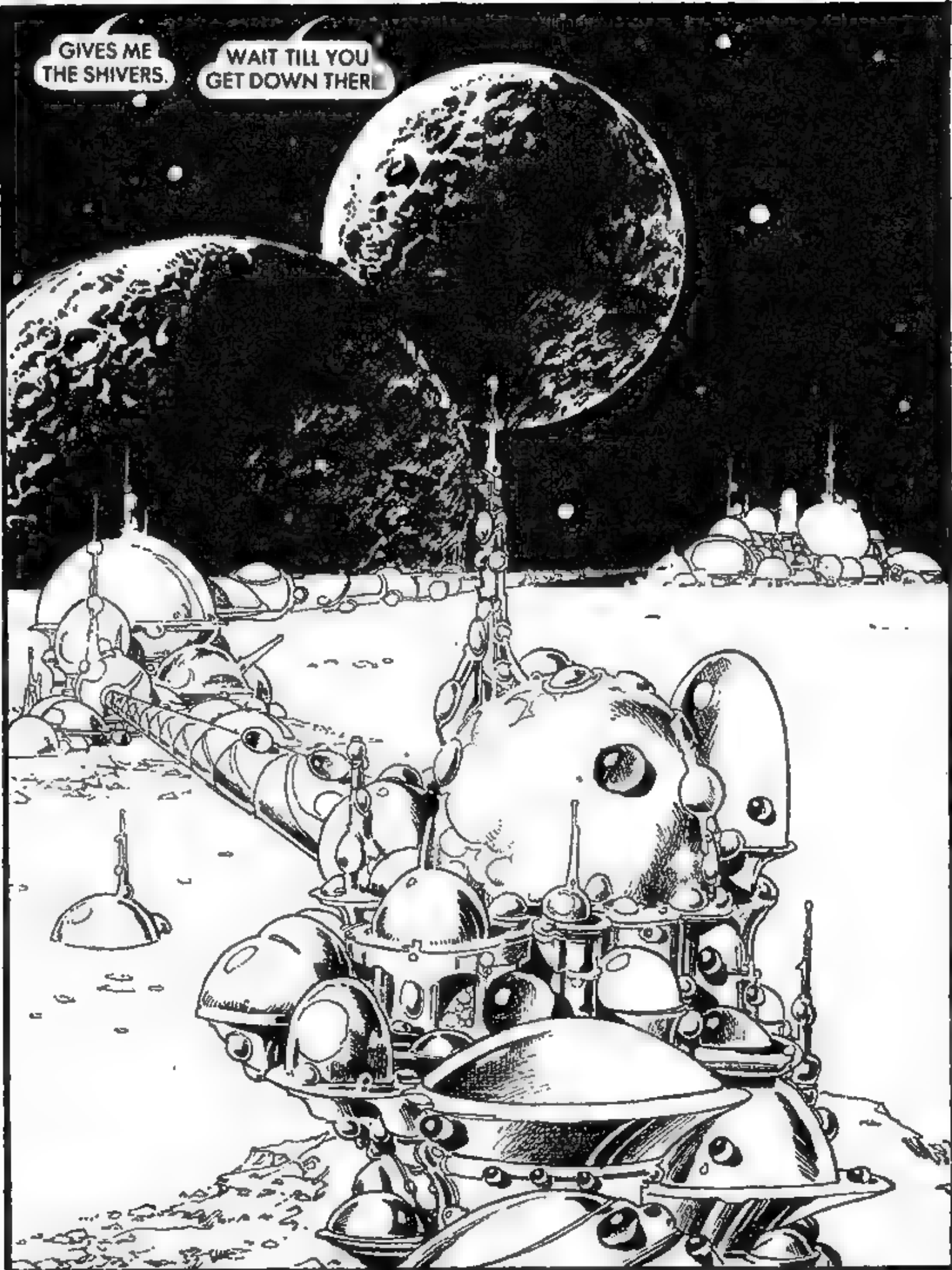
NOT VERY MUCH LATER.

EVEN THEIR PLANET
LOOKS SINISTER

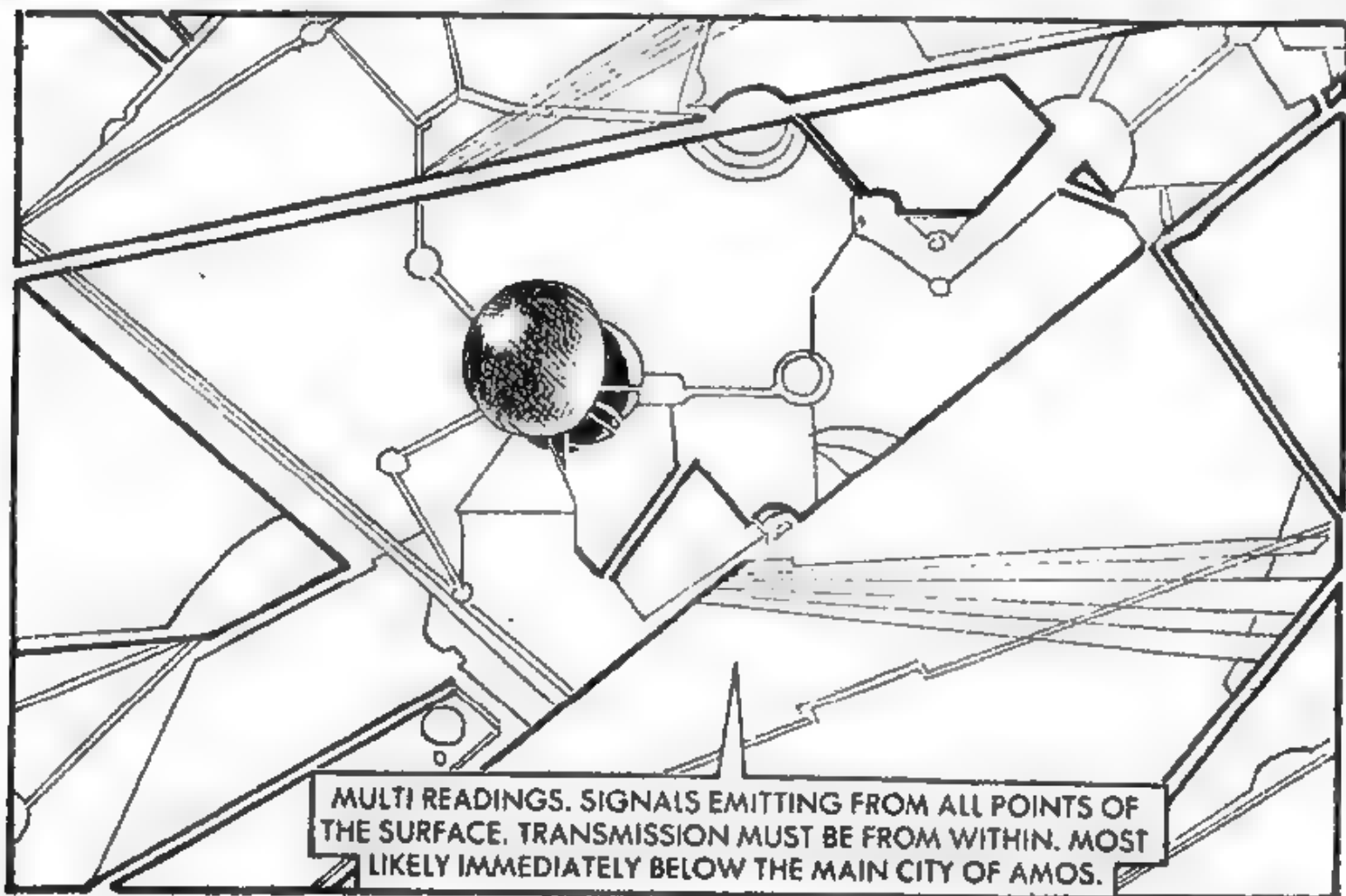


GIVES ME
THE SHIVERS.

WAIT TILL YOU
GET DOWN THERE



COMPUTER! I NEED THE MOST LIKELY
LOCATION FOR A MASSIVE ELECTRON
SCAN FOR SIGNALS. THERE
SHOULD BE PLENTY.



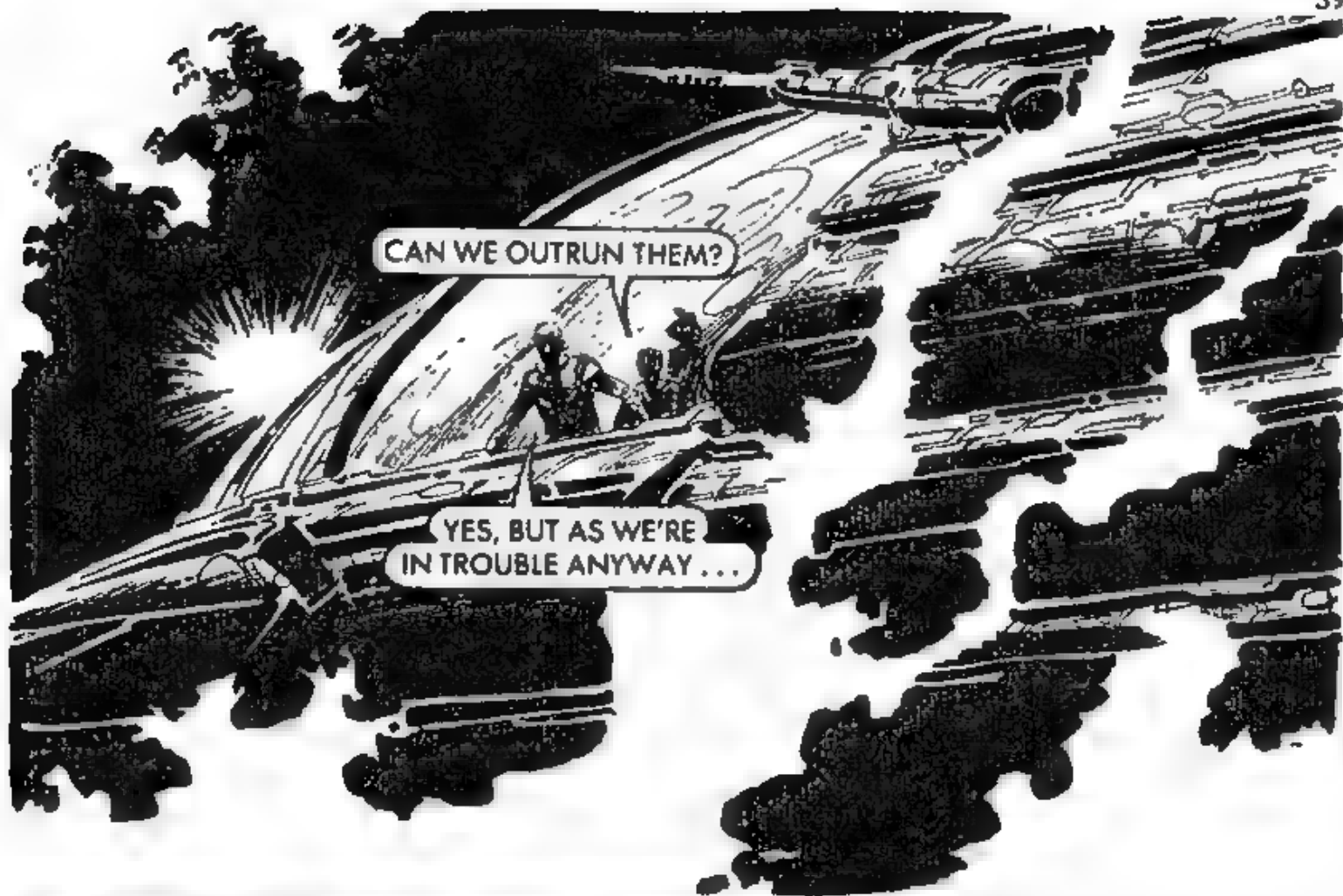
MULTI READINGS. SIGNALS EMITTING FROM ALL POINTS OF
THE SURFACE. TRANSMISSION MUST BE FROM WITHIN. MOST
LIKELY IMMEDIATELY BELOW THE MAIN CITY OF AMOS.

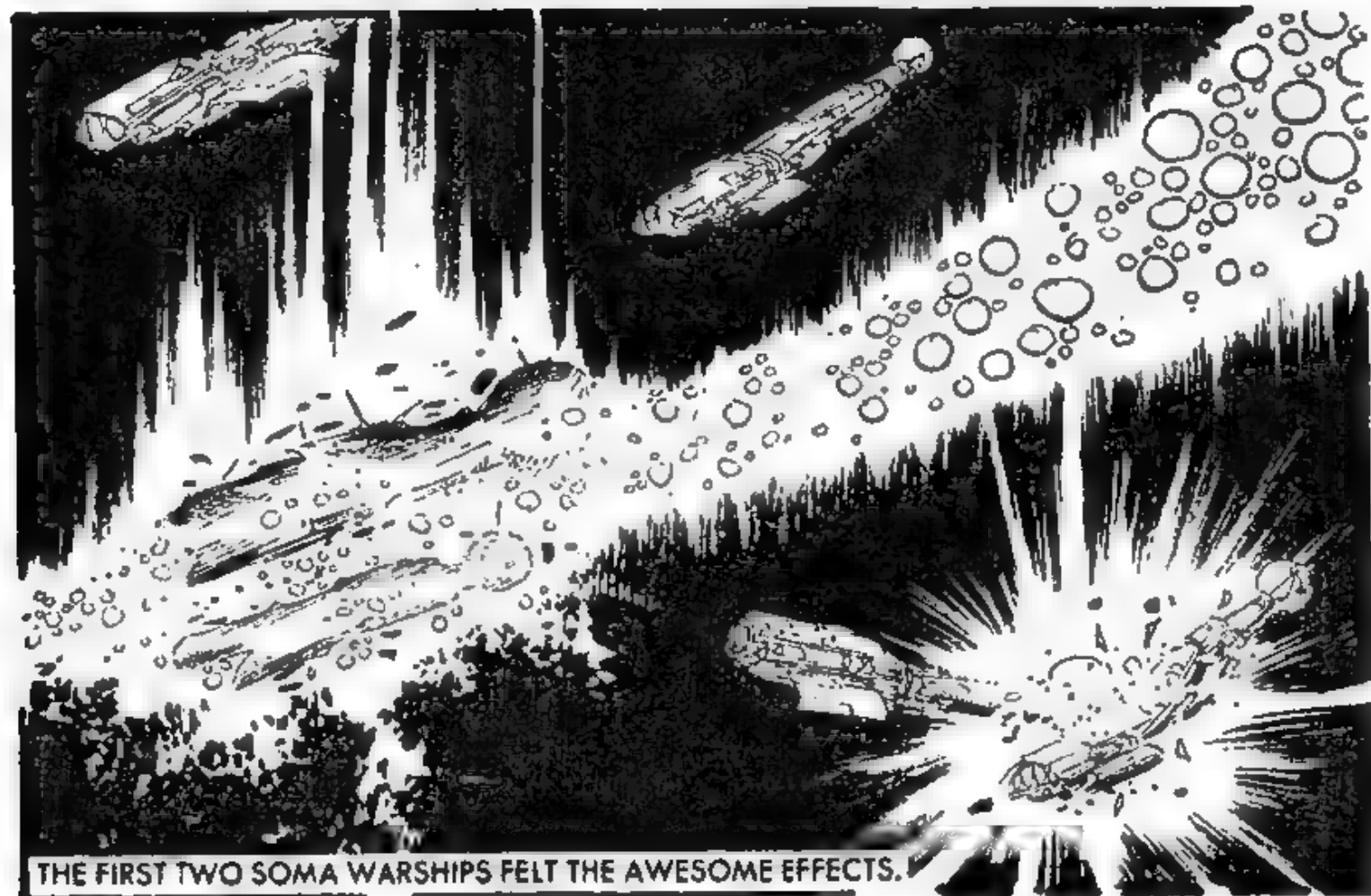
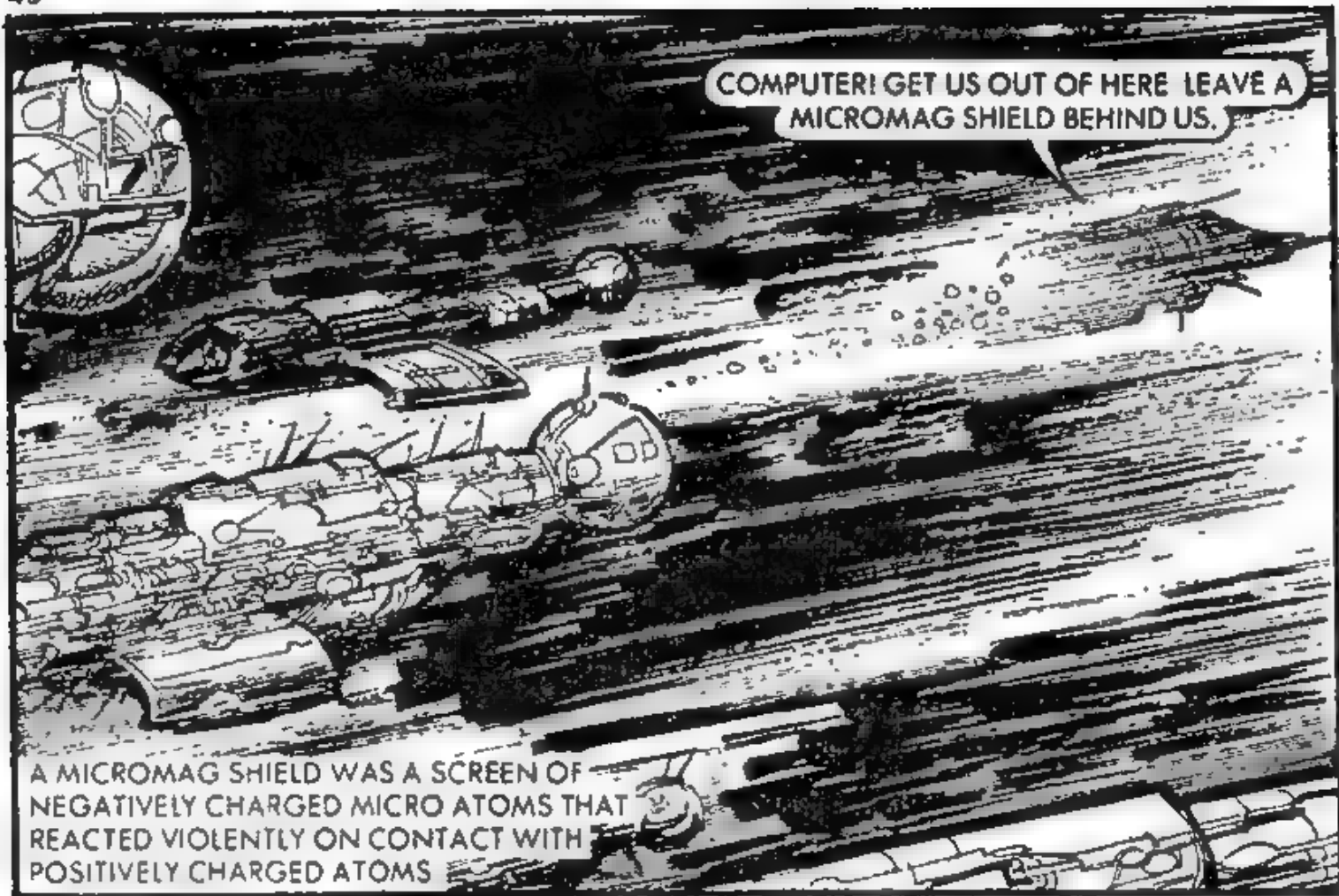
ZENOS FOCUSED THE NEUTRON TELESCOPE ON THE CITY OF AMOS.

I WONDER WHAT WOULD
HAPPEN IF WE BURST THOSE
BUBBLES?

WE'D HAVE THE WHOLE
FLEET AFTER US.

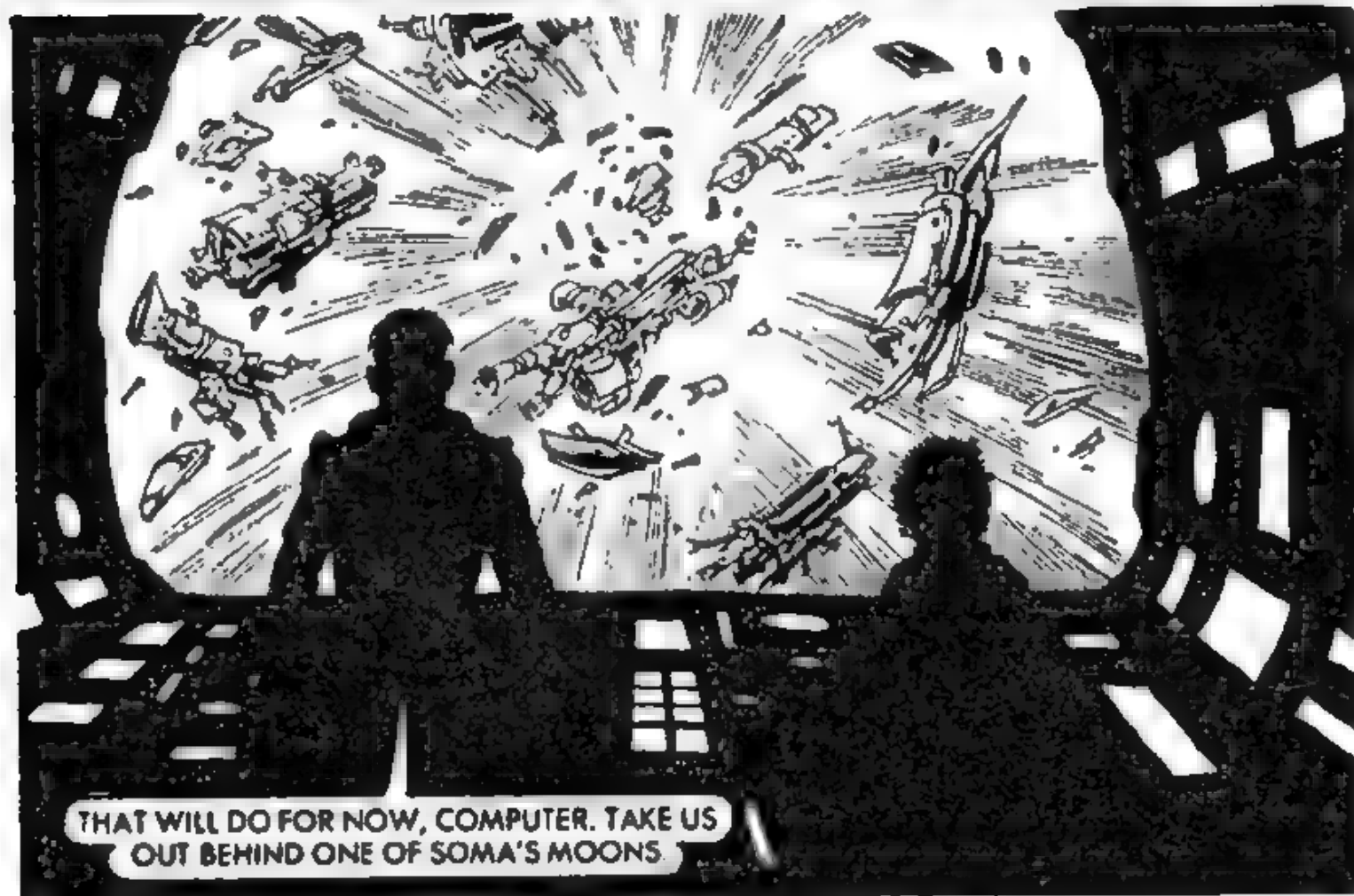
DANGER! DANGER! VESSELS, SECTOR 19 AND
CLOSING. CAN DETECT EXTERNAL SCANNING.







THE MAGNON RAIDER TURNED
AND RAINED FIRE AND
DESTRUCTION ON THE SOMA
FLEET



THAT WILL DO FOR NOW, COMPUTER. TAKE US
OUT BEHIND ONE OF SOMA'S MOONS


AS THE MOON SLOWLY ORBITED, THE COMPUTER SCANNED EVERY INCH OF SOMA'S SURFACE.

IT'LL BE DARK DOWN THERE SOON. THE
PEOPLE OF SOMA DISLIKE THE DARK—
WE'LL GO DOWN THEN.

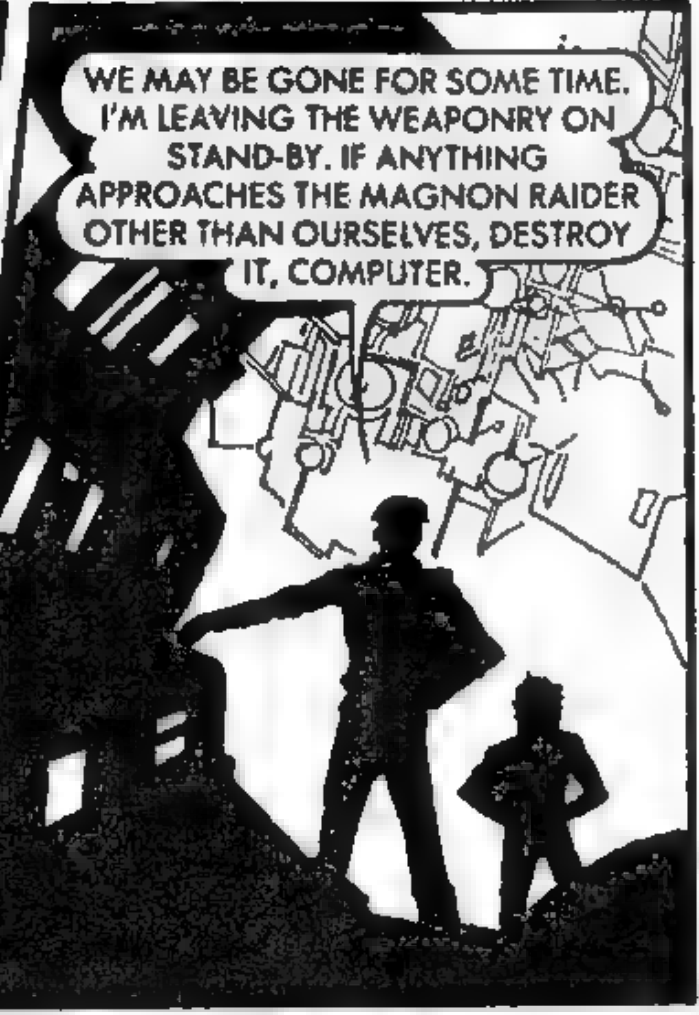
WHAT'S THE MATTER, JO?

HE SENSES DANGER.





HIS INSTINCT WARNS HIM
OF DANGER, BUT HE CAN'T
FIGURE OUT WHAT.



WE MAY BE GONE FOR SOME TIME.
I'M LEAVING THE WEAPONRY ON
STAND-BY. IF ANYTHING
APPROACHES THE MAGNON RAIDER
OTHER THAN OURSELVES, DESTROY
IT, COMPUTER.



WE'LL PUT DOWN AMONGST THOSE HILLS
AND HAVE A LOOK ROUND FROM THERE.

AS THEY PREPARED TO LAND,
UNSEEN EYES WERE
WATCHING THEM.





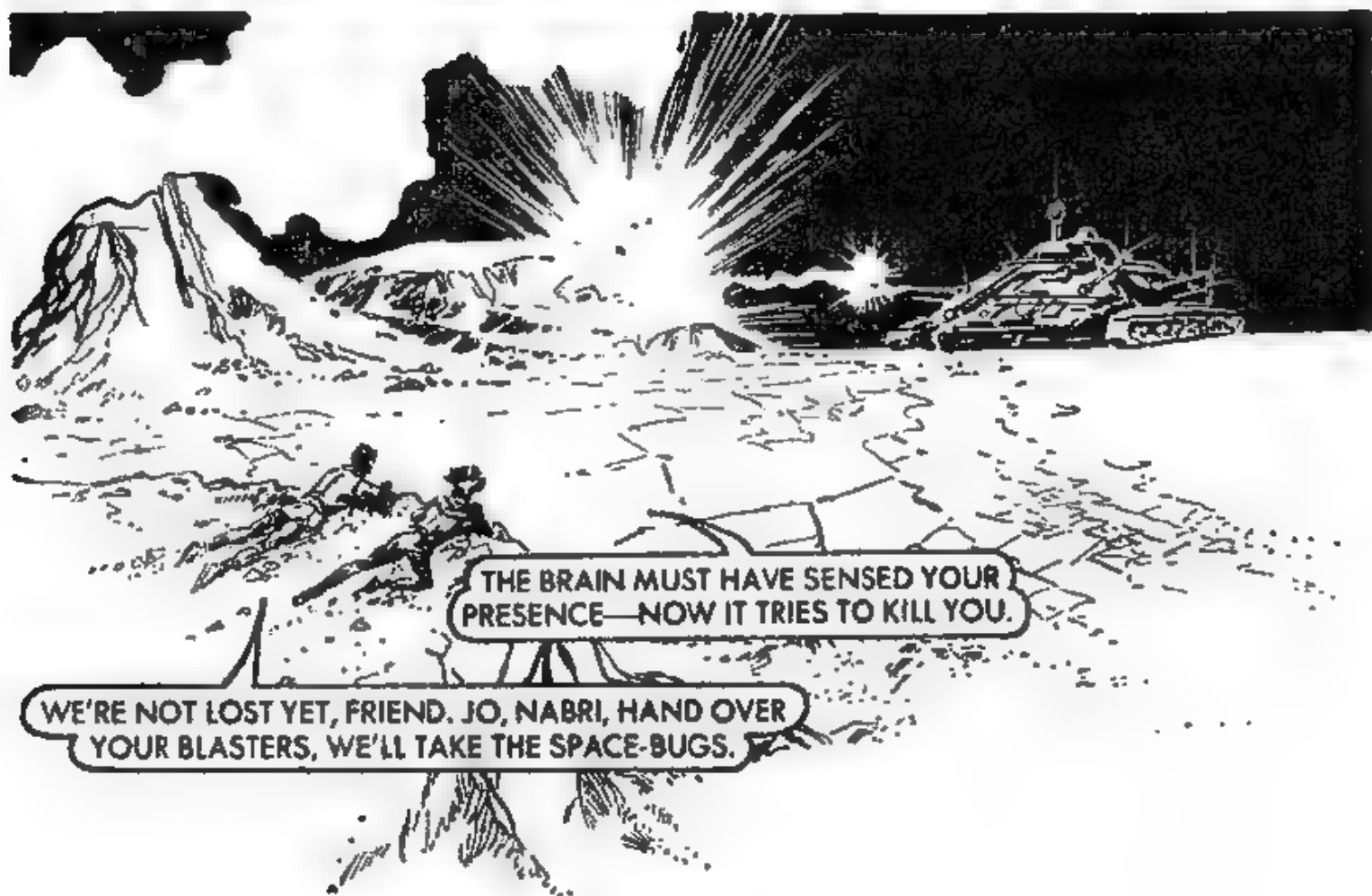






WHAT'S THAT?

IT IS A MACHINE OF
DEATH—A VENGETANK.

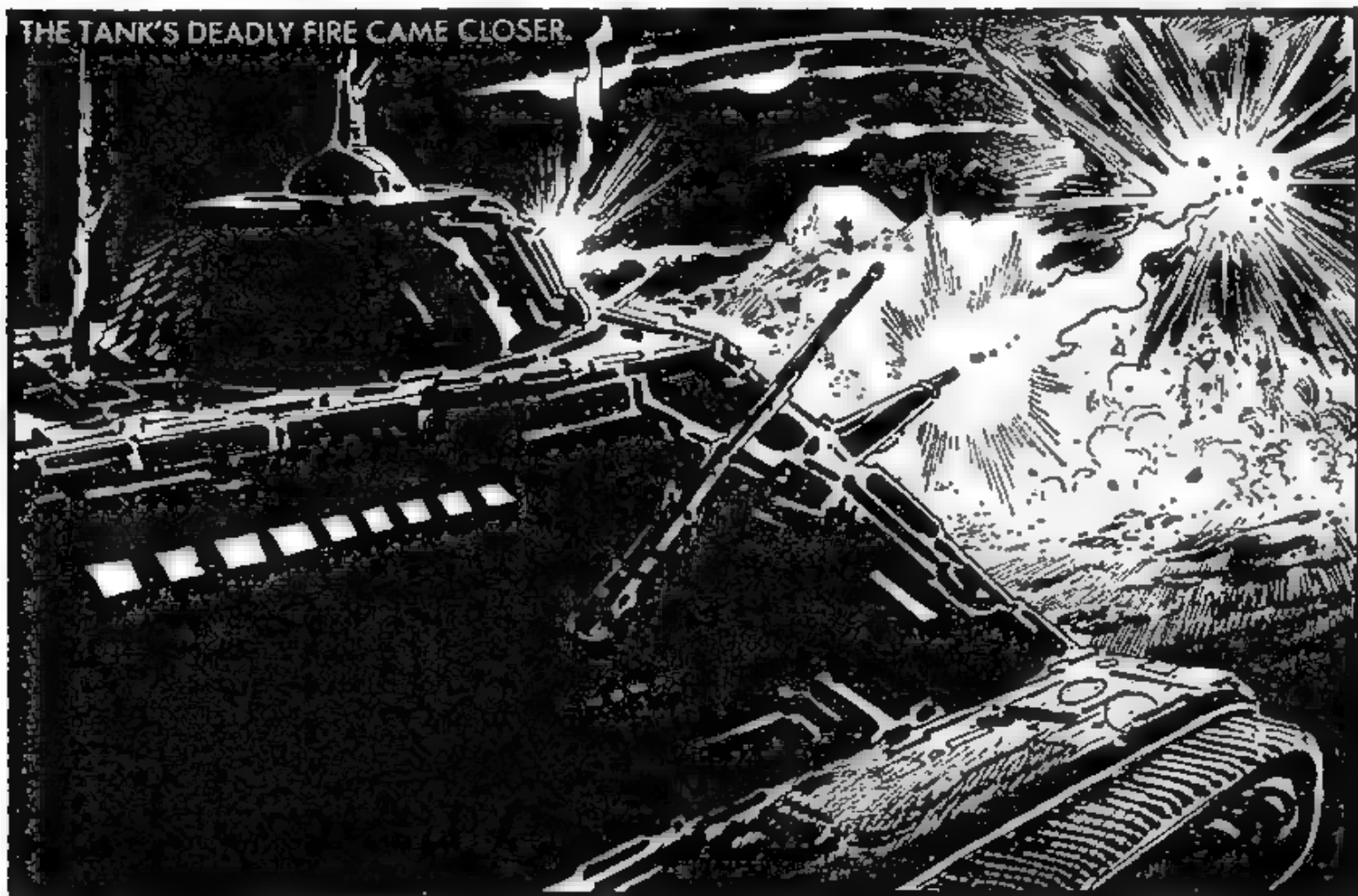


THE BRAIN MUST HAVE SENSED YOUR
PRESENCE—NOW IT TRIES TO KILL YOU.

WE'RE NOT LOST YET, FRIEND. JO, NABRI, HAND OVER
YOUR BLASTERS, WE'LL TAKE THE SPACE-BUGS.



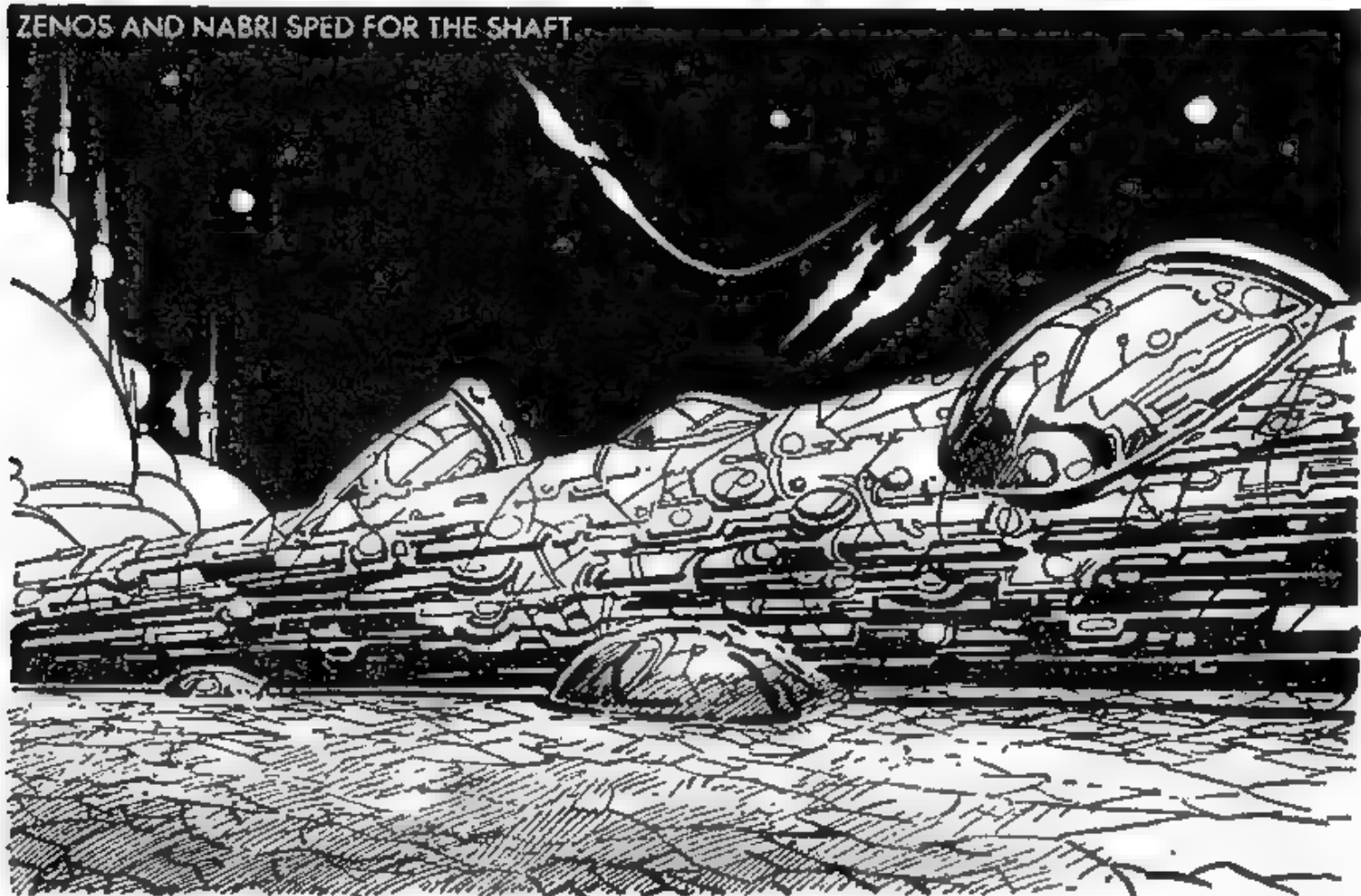
THE TANK'S DEADLY FIRE CAME CLOSER.



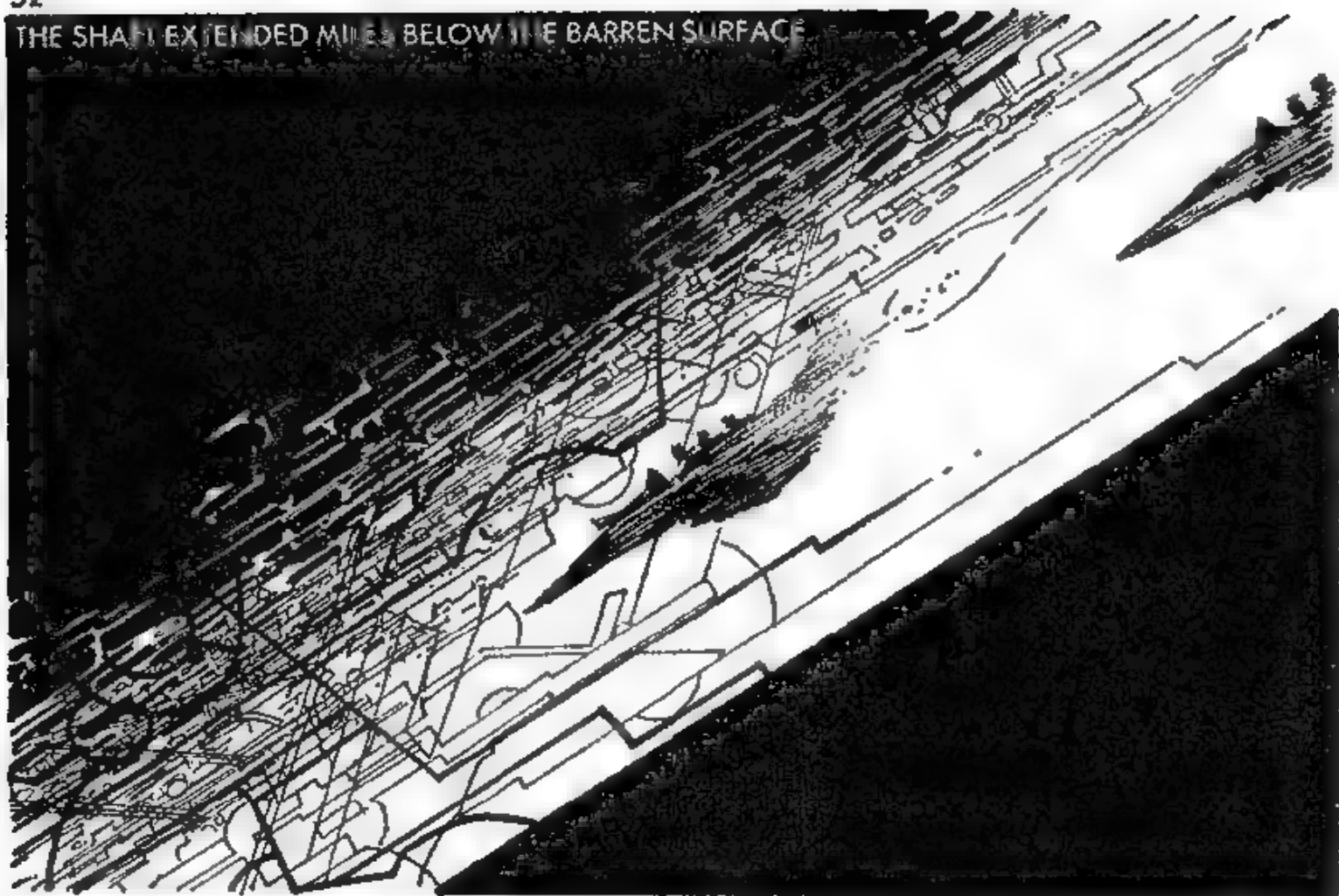
THE SPACE BUGS' MEGA-CANNON CHOPPED SAVAGELY THROUGH THE ARMOUR PLATE.



ZENOS AND NABRI SPED FOR THE SHAFT.



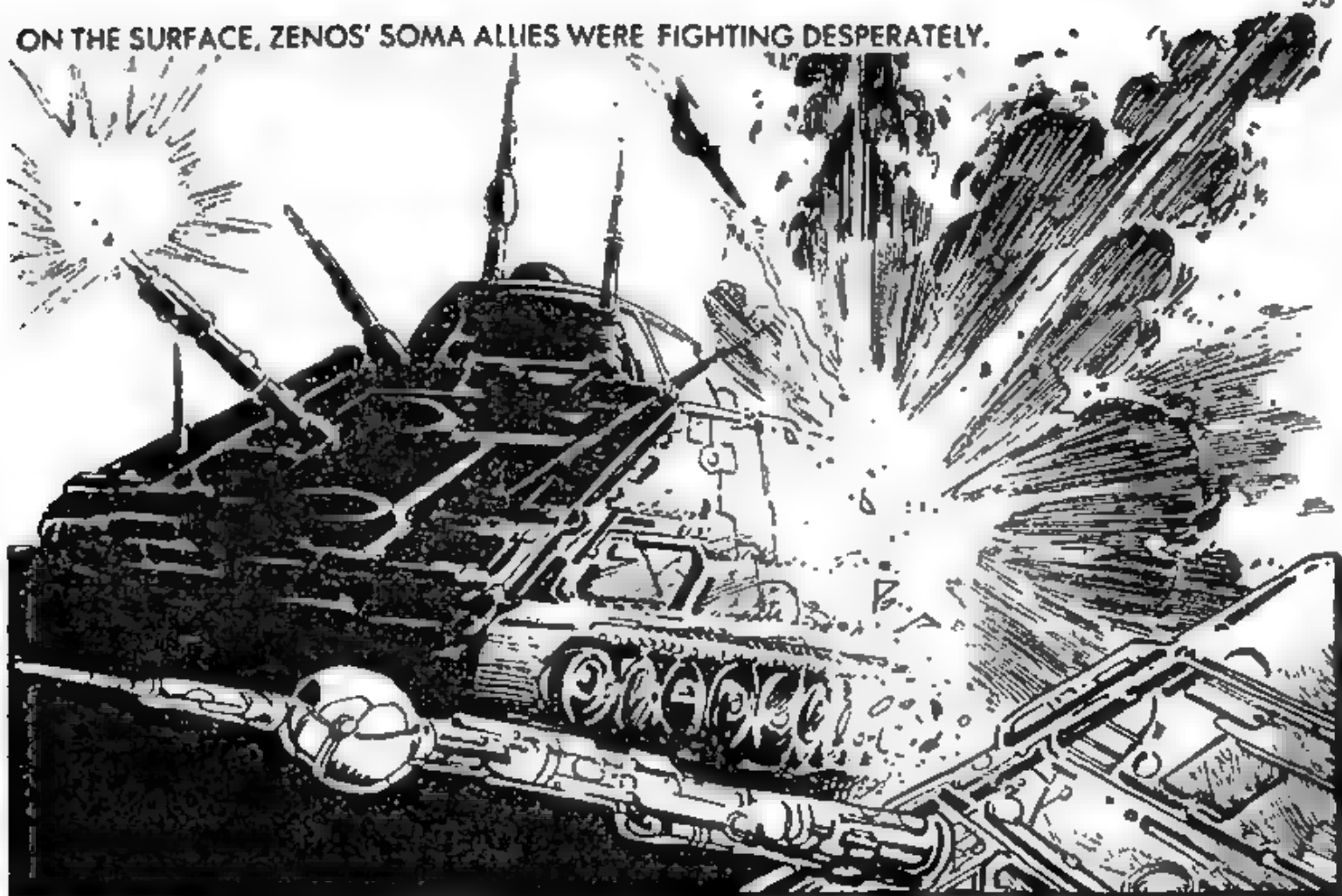
THE SHAFT EXTENDED MILES BELOW THE BARREN SURFACE



THERE'S THE
END, NABRI



ON THE SURFACE, ZENOS' SOMA ALLIES WERE FIGHTING DESPERATELY.



SOMETHING'S WRONG HERE
THERE'S NO BRAIN.

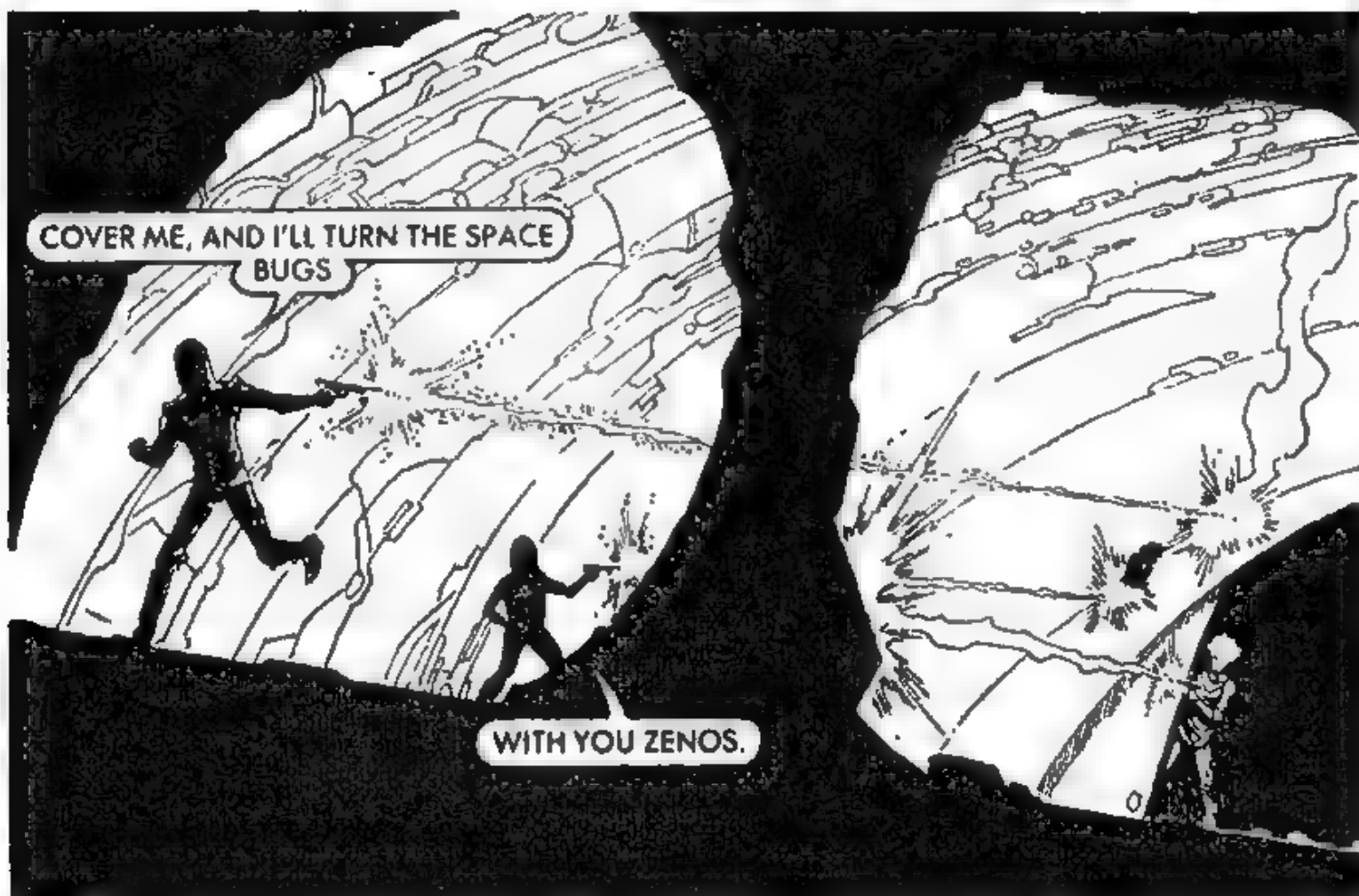
THERE ISN'T ENOUGH ROOM TO
TURN... WE'LL HAVE TO LAND



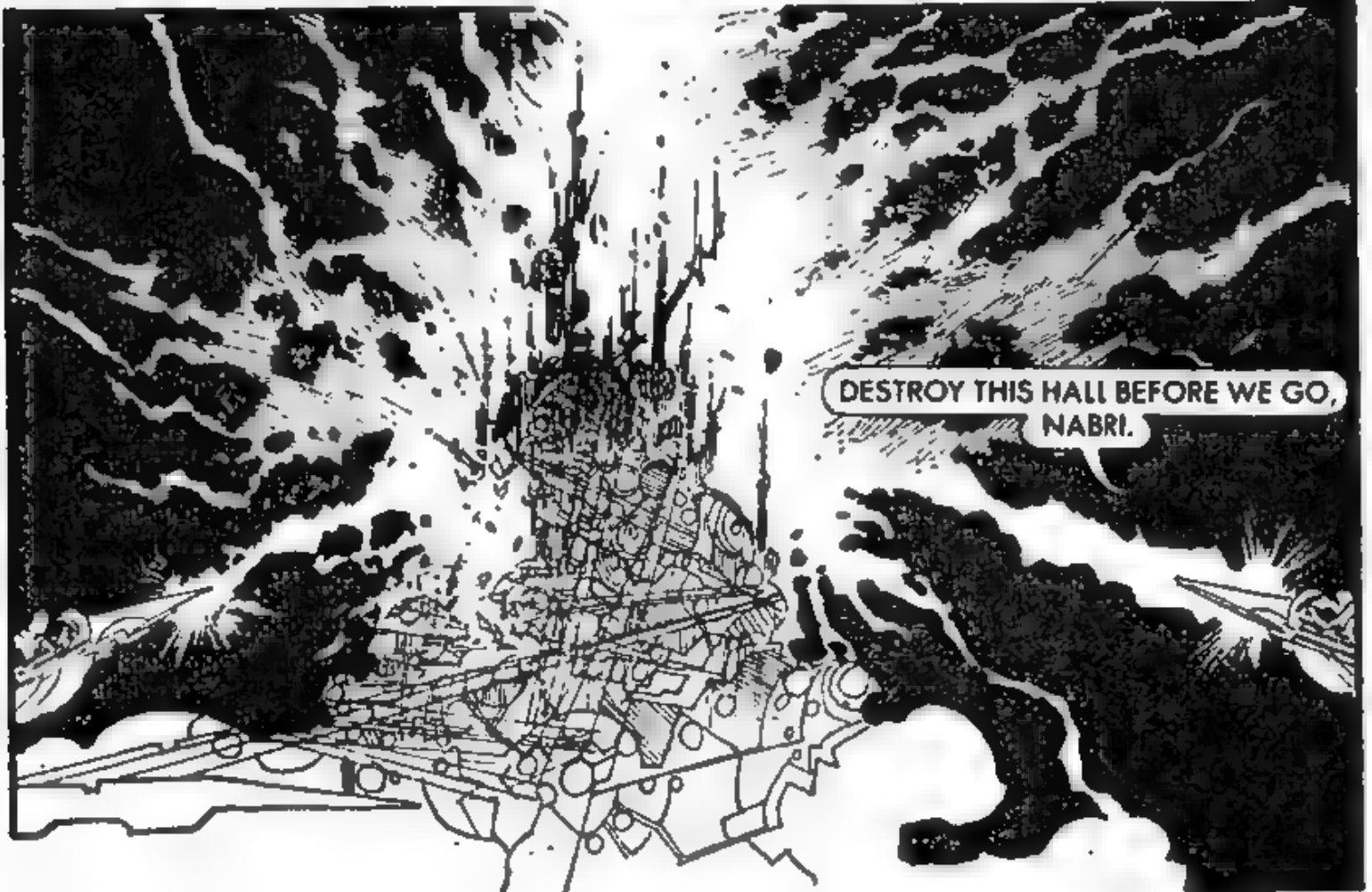
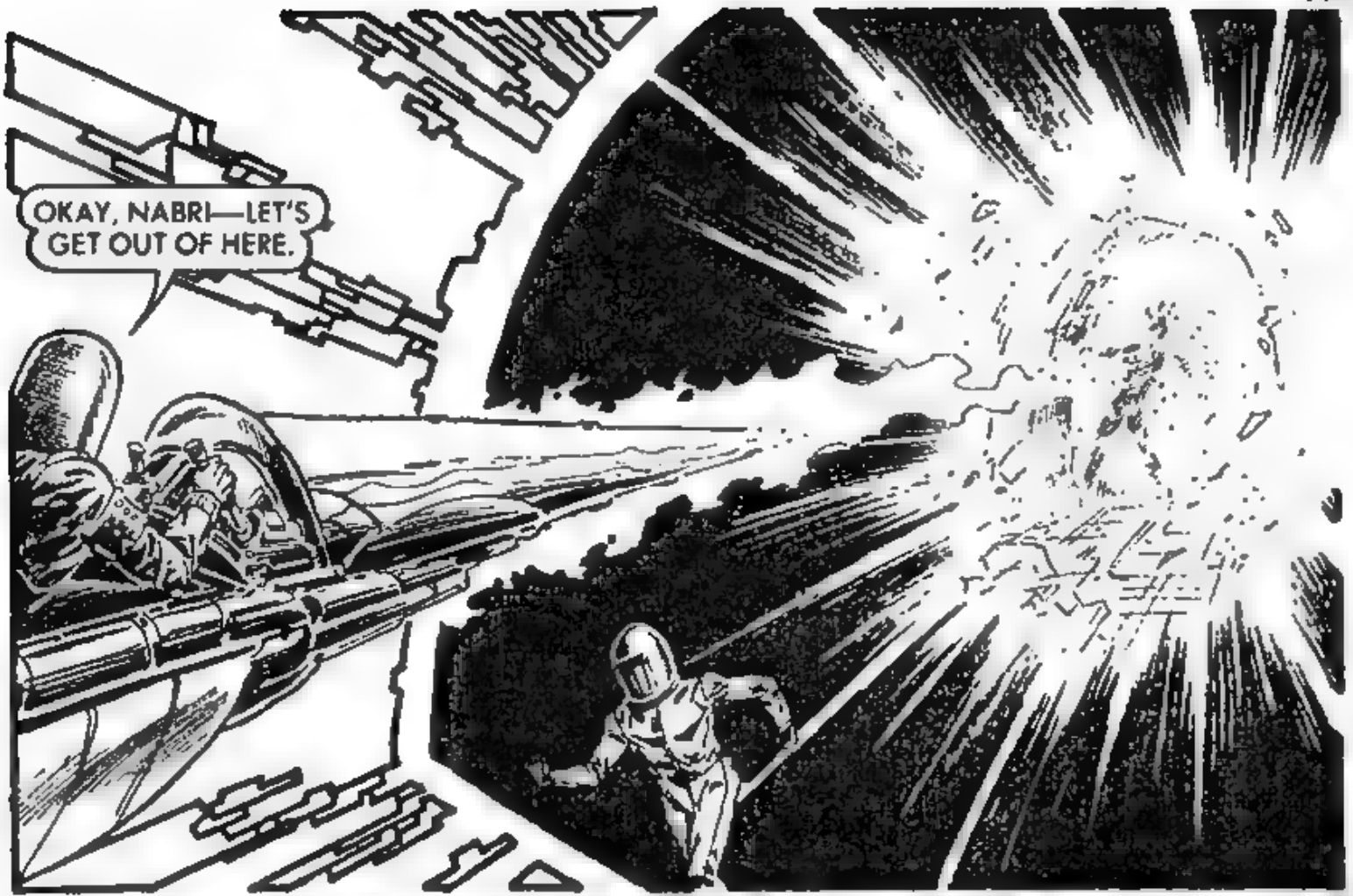
MORE SOMA. GRAB A BLASTER
AND HOLD THEM OFF, NABRI.



COVER ME, AND I'LL TURN THE SPACE
BUGS



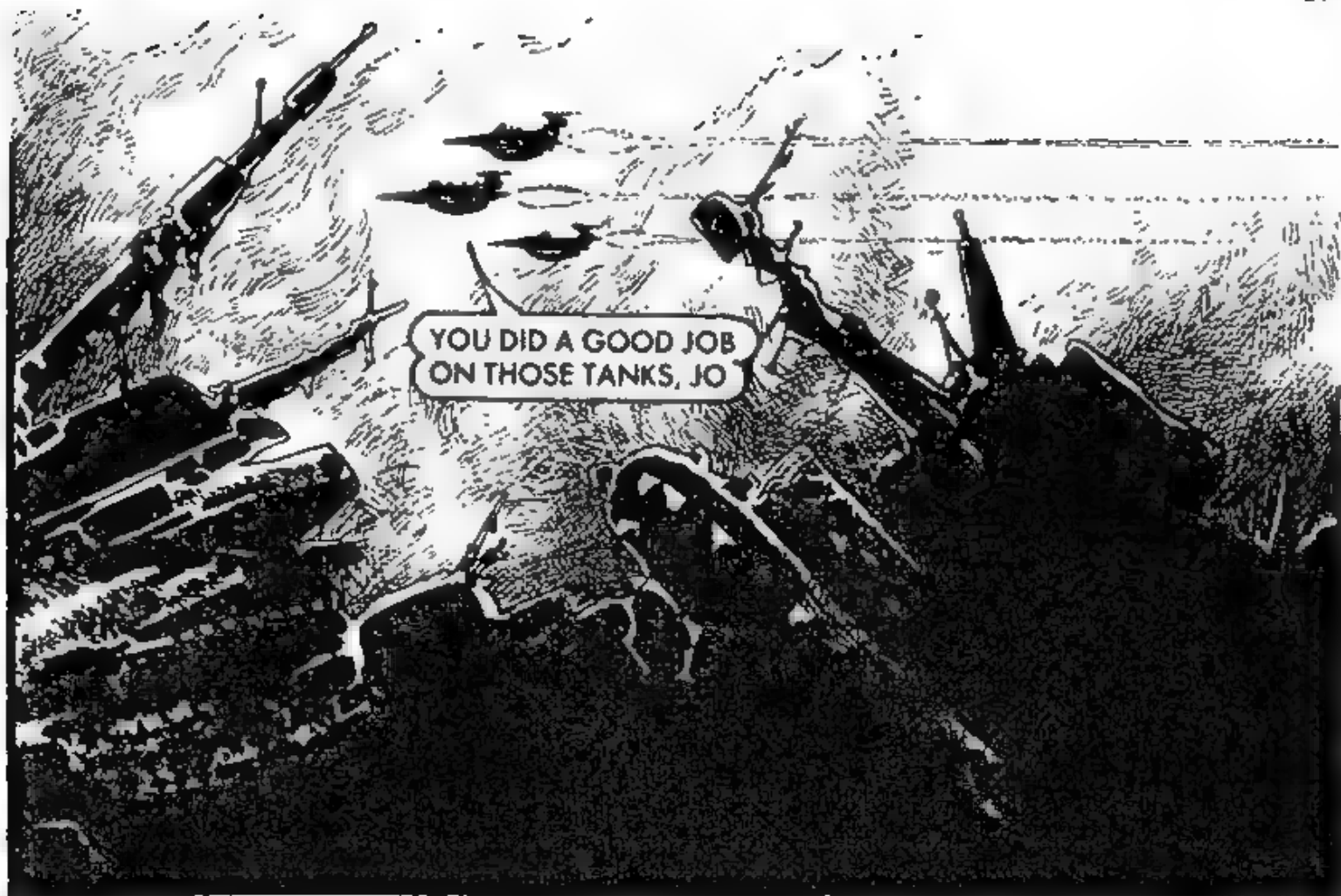
WITH YOU ZENOS.





WE'RE ALMOST OUT OF THE SHAFT.

THERE GOES
THE HALL.



THE TRIO LANDED AND PUZZLED OVER THE MYSTERY OF THE BRAIN.



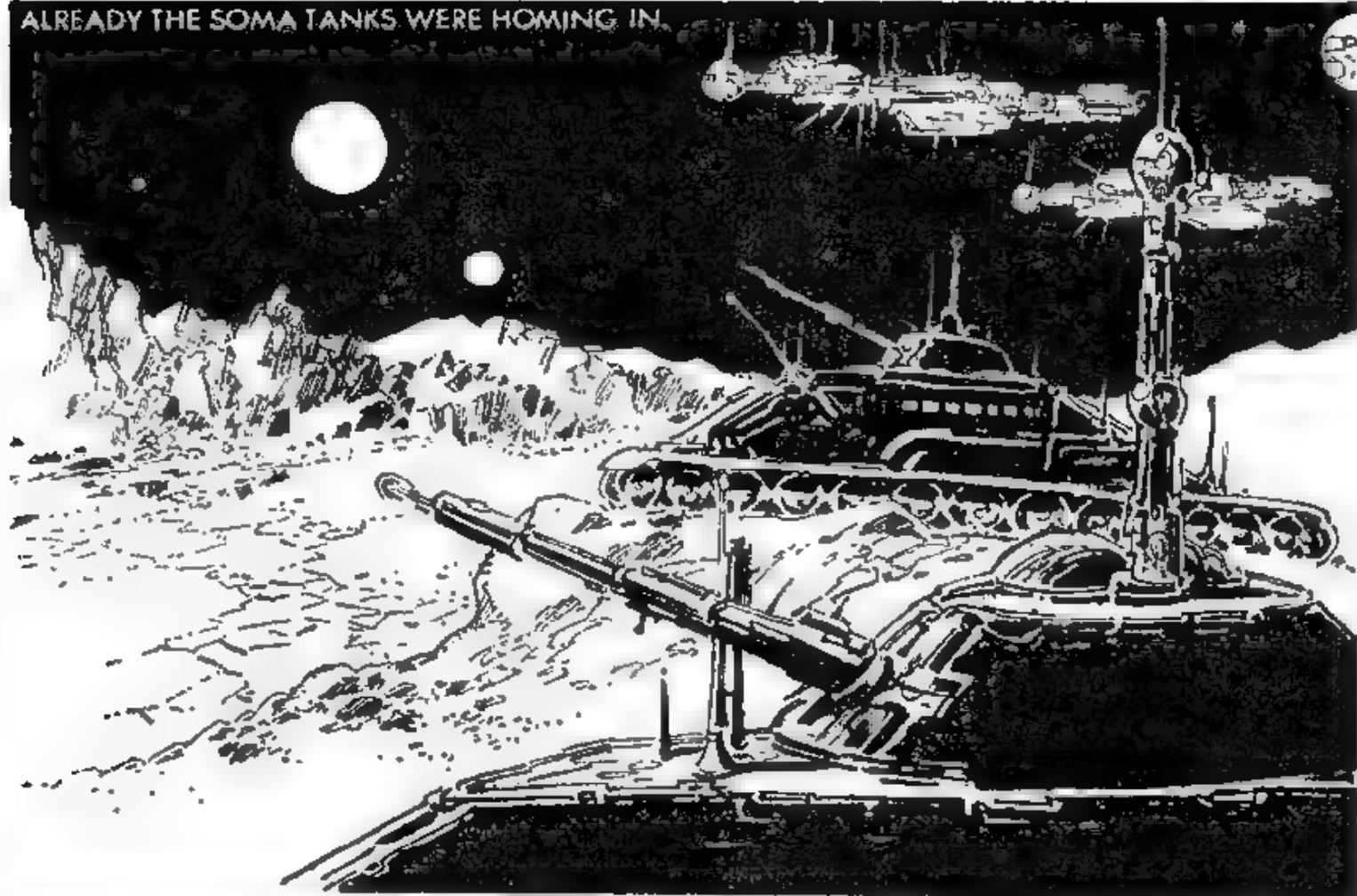


AS WE FLEW UP THE SHAFT I
NOTICED THAT MOON IN PERFECT
ALIGNMENT. THE BRAIN IS IN THAT
MOON.

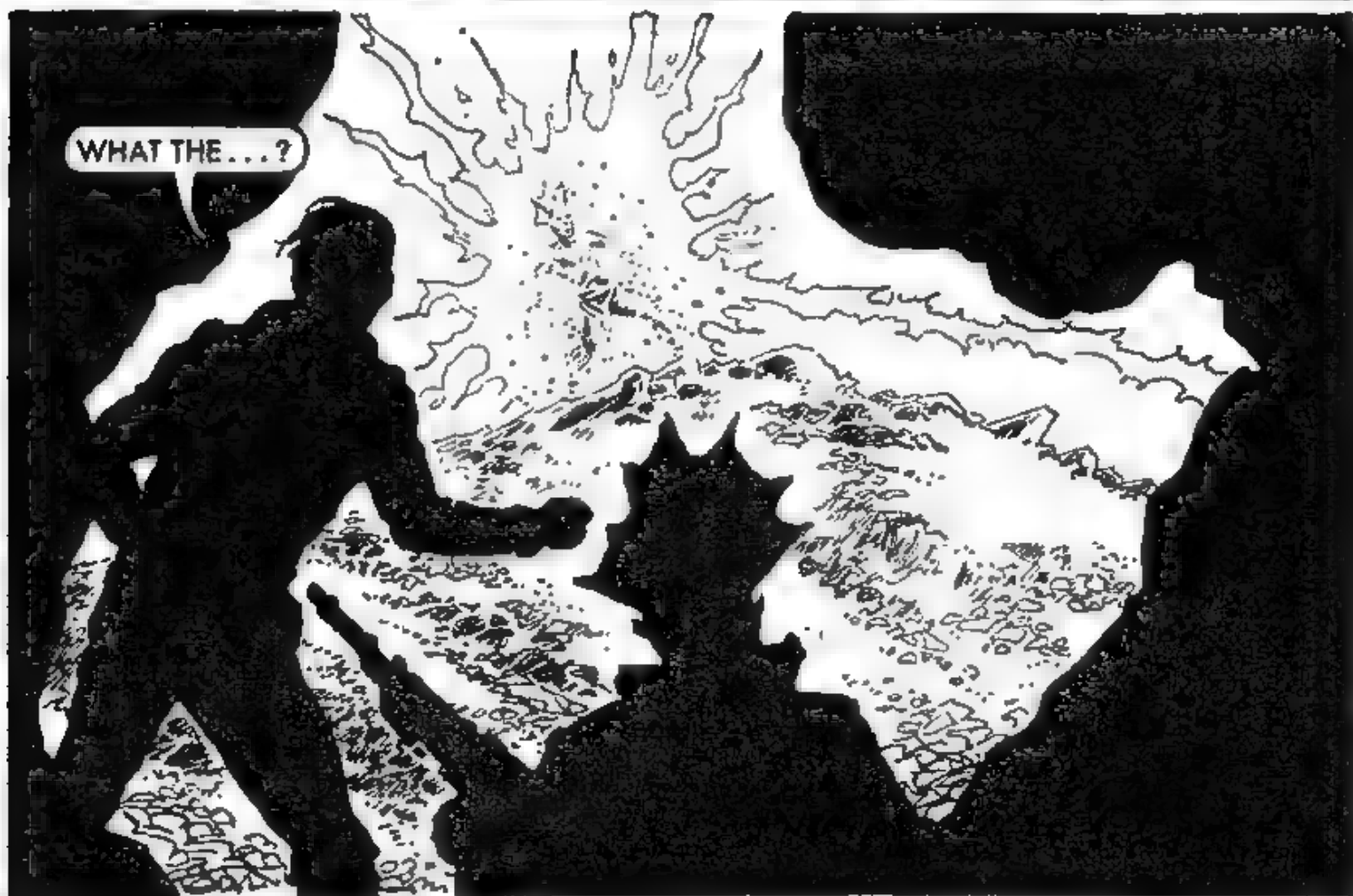
YOU MEAN, THE MOON
GIVES THE ORDERS AND
ALL THAT STUFF DOWN
THERE WAS MERELY A
RELAY STATION.

WITH THE BRAIN HIDDEN IN
THE MOON, THE POWER OF
SOMA WAS CHANNELLED
INTO TRANSMITTING THE
INSTRUCTIONS ACROSS THE
GALAXY.

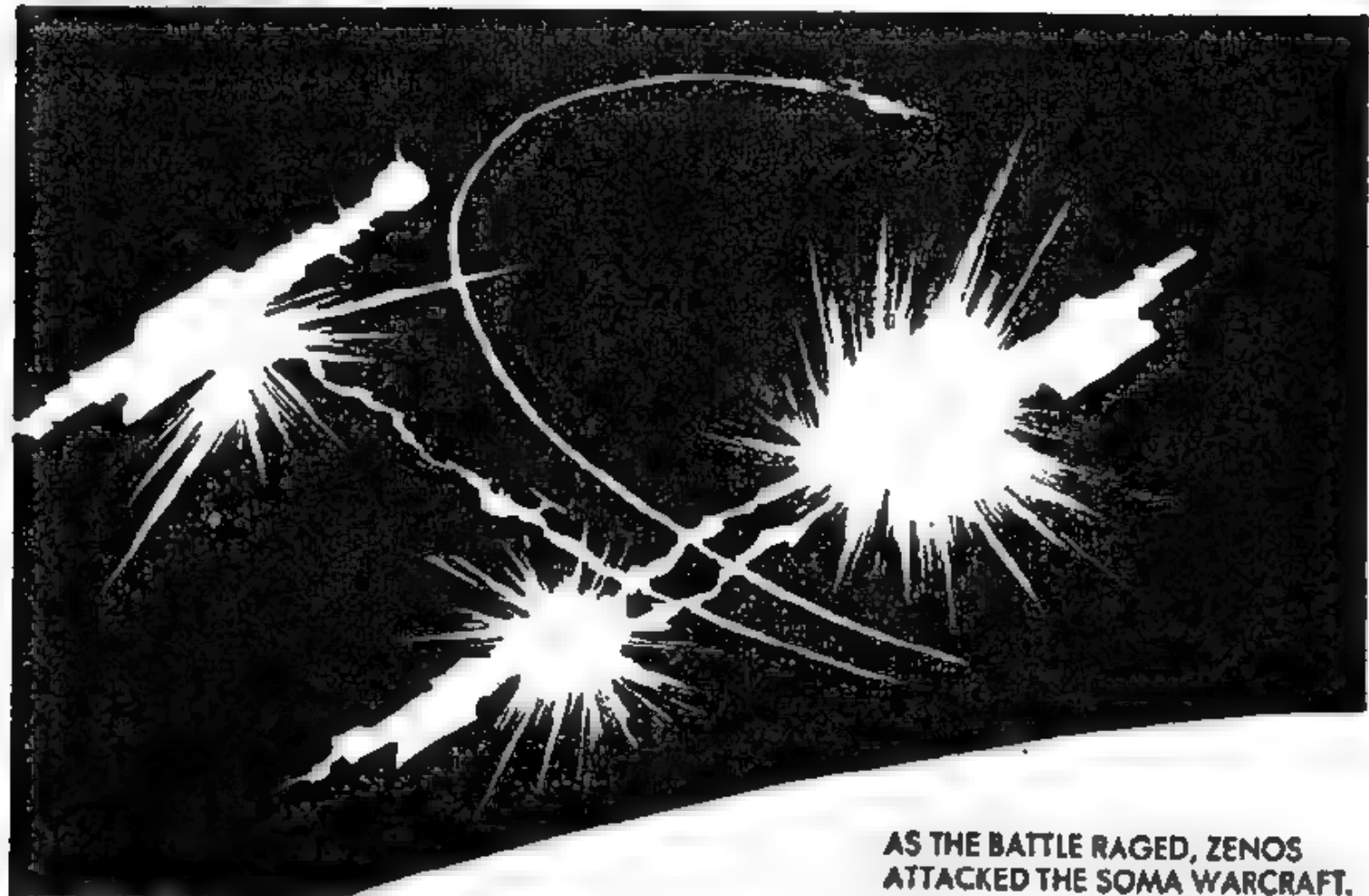
ALREADY THE SOMA TANKS WERE HOMING IN.



WHAT THE...?



ZENOS RACED FOR THE MAGNON RAIDER.



AS THE BATTLE RAGED, ZENOS
ATTACKED THE SOMA WARCRAFT.



JO AND NABRI TRIED TO HOLD THE TANKS OFF.



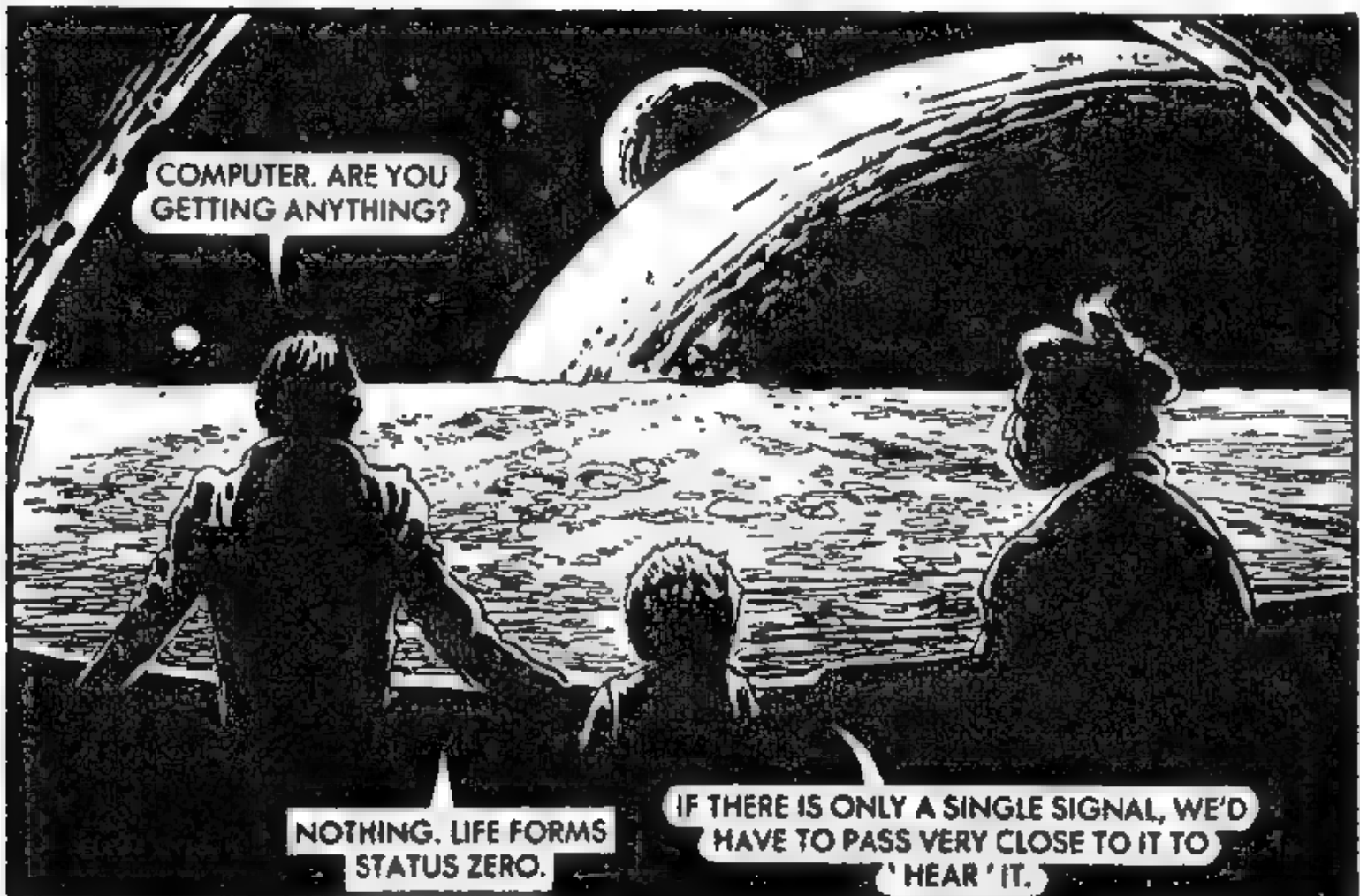
THE OPPOSITION WAS WIPED OUT IN AN INSTANT.



COMPUTER. ARE YOU
GETTING ANYTHING?

NOTHING. LIFE FORMS
STATUS ZERO.

IF THERE IS ONLY A SINGLE SIGNAL, WE'D
HAVE TO PASS VERY CLOSE TO IT TO
'HEAR' IT.

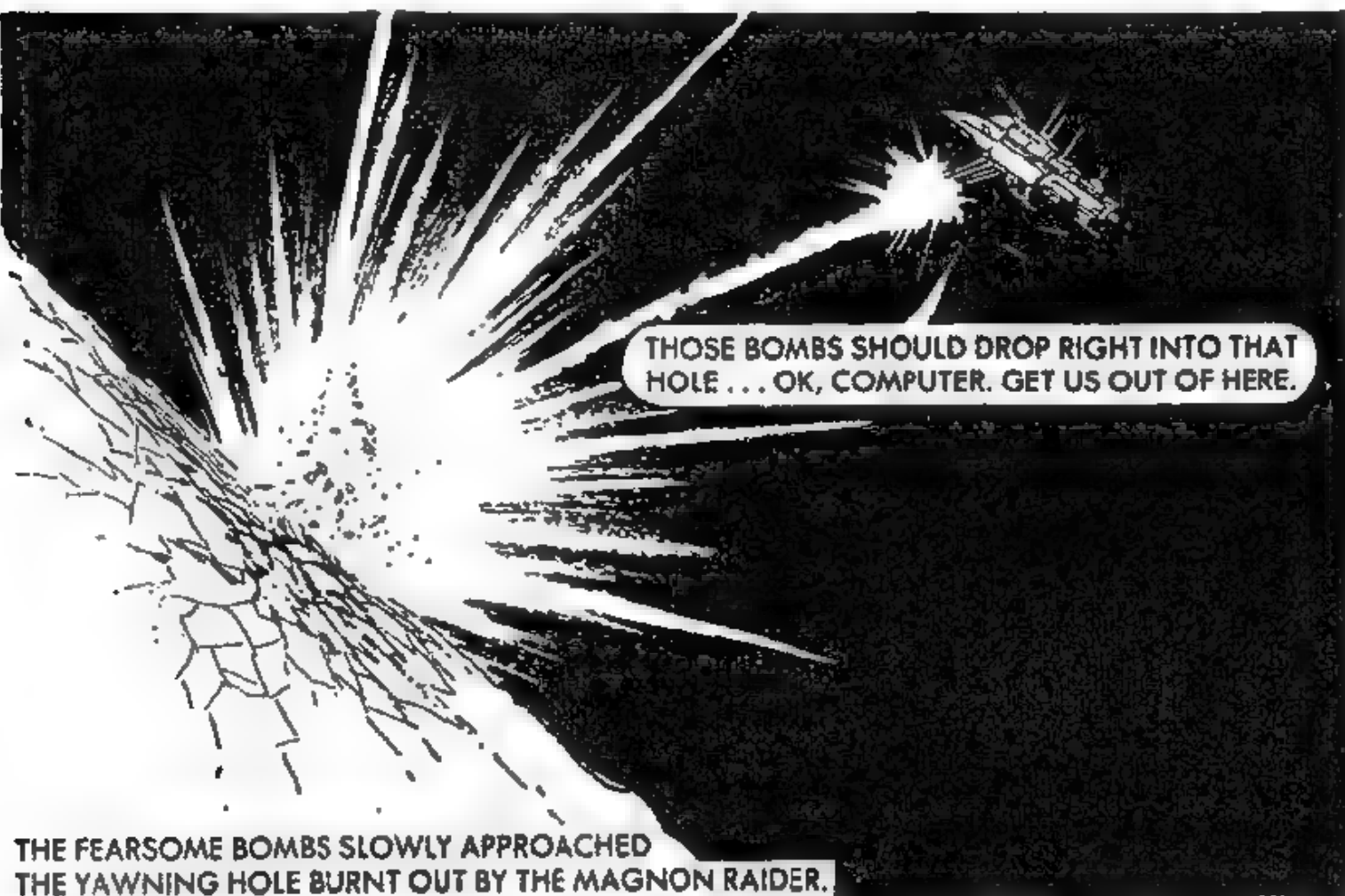


COMPUTER. I'M GOING TO MAKE A SWEEP. I WANT TWO NEUTRON BOMBS DROPPED AS WE PASS. BUT I WANT THEM TO GO IN SLOWLY. I'M GOING TO BLAST A HOLE IN THE SURFACE, FIRST.

CONFIRM.



THOSE BOMBS SHOULD DROP RIGHT INTO THAT HOLE . . . OK, COMPUTER. GET US OUT OF HERE.



THE FEARSOME BOMBS SLOWLY APPROACHED THE YAWNING HOLE BURNT OUT BY THE MAGNON RAIDER.

THE BOMBS EXPLODED CAUSING AN ENORMOUS
EARTHQUAKE WHICH CRACKED THE OUTER CASING OF THE
BRAIN



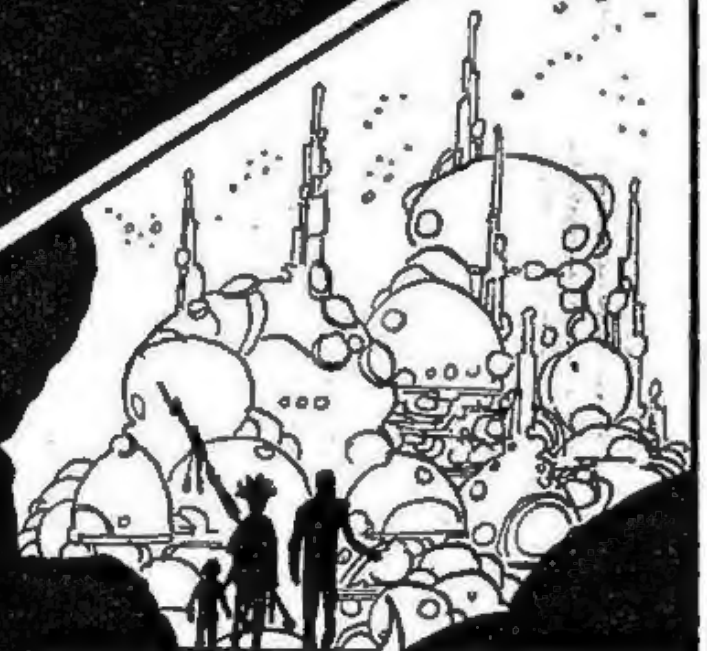
THE FIRE FROM THE MAGNUM RAIDER
POURED INTO THE CRACKING MOON,
AND SPLIT IT ASSUNDER

LATER, BACK ON SOMA.

I WOULD LIKE TO STAY BUT,
I MUST RETURN TO MY HOME.



I WOULD LIKE YOU TO COME WITH ME AS
AN OFFICIAL PEACE MISSION. YOU ARE
NOW THE LEADER HERE.



I WILL SEND A MESSAGE BACK TO EARTH
SO THAT MY PEOPLE CAN MAKE THE
PROPER ARRANGEMENTS.

ZENOS THE BANISHED RETURNED TO HIS NATIVE EARTH AFTER YEARS ALONE IN SPACE.

BACK HOME AGAIN—ON THE RIGHT
SIDE OF THE LAW THIS TIME.

COUNCIL AWAITS
HERO ZENOS
SOMA FORCES
DESTROYED!
PEACE FOR

**DON'T MISS THIS MONTH'S
OTHER ACTION-PACKED
ADVENTURE**



**ON SALE
AT YOUR
NEWS-
AGENT'S**

NOW!

STARBLAZERS

IN THE CONQUEST
OF SPACE

(16)



The Russians were extremely keen to get back into the space race. They decided to launch a converted one-seater Vostok capsule. On 12th October, 1964, Voshkod 1, containing three men, without spacesuits, Vladimir Komarov, Konstantin Feshtistov and Boris Yegorov, made 17 orbits of Earth and landed safely.